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FIRST DOWN, KENTUCKY!

RALPH D. PAINE

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FIRST DOWN, KENTUCKY!

BY

RALPH D. PAINE

AUTHOR OF
COMRADES OF THE ROLLING OCEAN, ETC.

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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FIRST DOWN, KENTUCKY!

CHAPTER I

THREE COPS ARE MORE'N USUAL

His pugnacious young features were aflame with excitement, and his shrill voice rose above the clamor in a series of agonized yelps.

"Hold 'em, Fort Hawley! Atta boy! Eat 'em alive! They're all yellow, the big lemons! Give 'em the rough stuff!"

In this chaste but impassioned manner did Bowman McMurray, aged fifteen, exhort to more desperate endeavor the embattled heroes of the Texas town. You may perhaps infer that the occasion was either riot or murder, but this was merely the annual football game between the high-school elevens of Fort Hawley and Waco. To the crowd that cheered and waved the rival colors there was a championship at stake, but to the black-haired boy in the blue denim shirt and patched breeches, it was one of life's supreme and splendid hours.

Presently he beheld the ensanguined youths of Fort Hawley take the ball and surge ahead for a thrilling gain. His emotions had quite worn him out and he could only murmur, with a grin of rapture:

"Just like a bullet through a chunk o' cheese!

Gee mighty, but I sho'ly do love a game o' football."

He had not aspired to a seat upon the tiers of planks where thronged the beauty and chivalry of Fort Hawley, but hovered near the high board fence, not far from the entrance gate. It was a strategic choice of position. Misfortune had threatened to blight this great day when he discovered that the twenty-five-cent piece required to buy an admission ticket had vanished through a hole in his pocket. Having delayed to await the finish of an uncommonly good dog-fight, his friends had all flocked in when he reached the field and there was nothing to do but skin over the fence and hope to dodge the policemen. Utterly absorbed in the shifting tide of the contest, he soon forgot to keep a wary eye lifted in the direction of the gate where lurked the plump and peevish Officer Gilson Givins.

The Fort Hawley eleven had just scored the first touch-down and the husky voice of Bowman McMurray was barking frenzied acclaim when a cruel hand gripped the back of his neck and he caught a frightened glimpse of a blue coat, bright buttons, and a scowling red face.

"I saw you beatin' it over the fence, you wicked little devil," rumbled Officer Gilson Givins, "but, I was too busy to leave the gate. Come along now, or I'll shake all your teeth loose."

There were memories of other encounters to prompt the policeman's harsh remarks, partic-

ularly the episode of the ripe tomato which had exploded against his left ear as he had strolled in the dusk through the street where dwelt the militant young McMurray. In this instance if he expected that his captive would meekly suffer ejection from the football grounds, the error was grievous. The majesty of the law overlooked the spiritual equation. As the boy regarded it, to be dragged away from this football game was an outrage unthinkable. His soul was in revolt, heedless of consequences.

"Ouch, you hurt! Let go a minute!" he pleaded. "I'll run over to the stand and borrow two bits to pay for your darn old ticket."

"I'd trust you as far as I could sling a cat. Pick up your feet and don't give me no more o' your lip," was the heated reply of Gilson Givins as he jerked the culprit toward the gate. To say that Bowman McMurray resisted an officer would be wholly inadequate. He simply erupted. It was foolish, but so is any forlorn hope. This was no mother's pampered darling, but a tough and agile chunk of a lad who weighed a hundred and thirty pounds. And it was to the policeman's disadvantage that he had too little wind and too much beef.

"I *told* you to quit chokin' me," blubbered Bowman, and with this he twisted free and rammed his head into the stomach of Officer Givins who grunted and clapped both hands to that expansive region. While he was thus engaged, a hard fist smote him in the eye and his shins were kicked

with the most zealous energy. He was both pained and amazed. The boy had gone clean crazy. It wouldn't do to use a club on him, and the policeman, who was in a fair way of becoming a complete ruin, lunged clumsily and grabbed the blue denim shirt in both hands. It tore away in his grip, and then the boy swarmed all over him. When next they broke apart, a diving tackle knocked the props from under fat Gilson Givins and he smote the turf with a mighty thud.

The sole aspiration of Bowman McMurray was to see the football game, and even as he scrambled to his feet he turned to gaze at the entangled mass of players who were piled up in mid-field. Just then two other policemen left the side-line and loped toward this scene of private carnage. They were more amused than otherwise as they descried the wreckage of Officer Gilson Givins who was by no means the most popular member of the force. It seemed a trifling matter to lay hold of this rampageous boy and chuck him through the gate, but Bowman McMurray had ceased to reckon with the odds. No more had Davy Crockett and Colonel Bowie! It was the spirit of the Alamo. True Texans fought until they dropped if you crowded them too far. Tearful but undismayed, Bowman panted:

"Gee mighty, have I got to lick *three* cops and watch a football game at the same time?"

He stood entranced as the Fort Hawley full-back caught the ball on the kick-off and flashed

like a meteor through the broken field. Then the blue-coated reënforcements closed in. They were lanky men and fast on their feet. The groggy Gilson Givins was right side up by this time and he manœuvred to cut off the line of retreat. It was now his baleful intention to throw this young outlaw into the patrol wagon and put him in the pen, charged with assault and battery, mayhem, attempted murder, and a few other things.

Poor Bowman dodged, but one of the enemy deftly hurled a club at his legs and he tripped headlong, turning a somersault and rebounding like a rubber ball. This instant of delay enabled them to surround him, and one caught him by the slack of the trousers while another got his fingers into the shock of black hair. Their quarry was a whirlwind of flying arms and feet. He wriggled and squirmed like a basket of eels. When they tried to pin him down and flatten him out by sheer weight, he wasn't there. A boot-heel smote a policeman on the jaw and something told him that the recent job of expensive dentistry would have to be done all over again. He lost his temper entirely and jerked the club from his belt.

Meanwhile the football game subsided for a few minutes' interlude at the end of the first quarter. A slender, alert young man was one of the first to espy the cyclone which raged in the corner near the gate, and he arrived in time to shout:

"Drop that club, Jackson! What do you mean? If you hit that boy, I'll have you tried for it."

The angry officer stood abashed and ashamed of himself as he sulkily replied:

"I didn't reckon to hit him hard, Mr. Caldwell —jes' to scare him. We ain't able to do nothin' with him a-tall."

"Three of you, eh? Why don't you call out the reserves?" retorted Fayette Caldwell, attorney-at-law, and the humor of it got the better of his indignation. "Come here, boy, and tell me what it's all about."

The policemen three resented this interference and the crumpled Gilson Givins was for retaining his clutch on Bowman McMurray. but the young lawyer spoke sharply.

"Turn him loose, you big lunkhead. I'll be responsible for him. Now, son, you certainly did put up a wonderful scrap for your tender years, but what started it?"

Bowman McMurray stepped clear of the foemen, but kept a vigilant eye on them as he tried to hitch his tattered garments together. He mopped his dusty, tear-stained face with what remained of a sleeve and smiled at his unexpected friend as he explained in unsteady accents:

"I was shy two bits, please, suh, to pay my way in, and this fat cop jumped on me. I told him to let me be while I found somebody to loan me the price, but he started to run me out. He was mean — took hoid of my neck, and it hurt. I just naturally couldn't stand for that, so I went to it."

"Why didn't you give him the slip? He couldn't catch you."

"And miss the biggest game of the year? You're jokin'," earnestly affirmed the youngster. "Anyhow, this ornery old cop had no business usin' me like that."

"Is this true, Givins?" demanded Fayette Caldwell. "Did he offer to buy a ticket?"

"Mebbe he did," grunted the accused, "but this ain't the first time I ever met Bo McMurray, dern him."

"McMurray?" queried the lawyer. "Here, boy, who-all do you belong to? Is your dad Tom McMurray, foreman at the car shops?"

"Yes, suh. My name is Bowman, and I'm a freshman in high school. I ought to be in the next class, but I got set back. The principal won't let me play football this season—says I'm a born scrapper an' need to be disciplined a whole lot."

"You were set back? Nonsense, Bowman! You are too bright a kid for that. You had better come over to the field and see the rest of the game with me. Here's a ticket for him, Givins."

"This yere infernal boy is under arrest, Mr. Caldwell," protested the vengeful policeman. "If you want to see him, you can go look in the calaboose this evenin'."

The two other officers were sauntering back to their posts of duty in front of the crowded grandstand. They were sensible enough to perceive that no credit was to be gained from this affair.

It was an excellent idea to let it alone. Fayette Caldwell was a very young lawyer, but he had many friends in Fort Hawley and was known to be as smart as a whip. His eyes snapped as he said to the stupid, obstinate Gilson Givins:

"Do you want to be laughed out of town? This young tarrapin licked the stuffing out of you, and two more cops had to come to the rescue. What do you say to my dropping into the *Daily Messenger* office and giving Dick Folsom the story? He sure does sling a mean pen and he'd yell for joy at a funny one like this."

"It ain't right to let law and order get busted all to hell this way, Mr. Caldwell," grumbled the other. "but I don't like the notion of bein' joshed by Dick Folsom for doin' my duty and—"

"All right, Bowman. Come along. You are on probation," briskly exclaimed the protector. "It's a private bargain, between you and me."

"Not with my clothes all tore up, Mr. Caldwell. Give me the ticket, if you please, and I'll stay right here. I fought to hold this piece of ground."

"Right you are, then. Supposing you wait for me at the gate after the game and we'll walk downtown together."

"You bet I will!" cried the boy in a tingling glow of gratitude. "You can't lose me."

There was another spectator, a very timid one, who now advanced a few steps, hesitated, and displayed symptoms of profound agitation. Her hair hung down her back in two braids, thick and

yellow, and the blue eyes were suffused with a pitying tenderness. It was perfectly horrid, of course, for Bowman McMurray to be fighting with a policeman, but the maternal instinct of this schoolmate of his conquered the obligation to scold him. She waited for some encouragement, but he merely nodded and glowered at her, as though intimating that he desired to have her mind her own business.

"I can spare several pins as well as not, Bo, and one of 'em is a safety-pin," she ventured. "Goodness, your elbow is all skinned, and your nose is scratched something awful. Want my handkerchief?"

"Much obliged, Nan," was the gruff response, for the hero had become taciturn, ill at ease, indifferent. "I'm all right. You needn't bother."

"It's no trouble, I assure you," primly answered Nancy Overton. "I'd much rather help fix you up than see any more football. It is a very brutal sport, in my opinion."

"Silly! Just like a girl! Well, if you've got to, you might hitch the back of my shirt together. And don't jab any pins into me, understand?"

With fluttering fingers Nancy pinned the worst rents, convinced that Bowman would box her ears if she accidentally pricked him. She was a tall girl, rangy and long-legged, with hints of dawning beauty in the childish immaturity of her fourteen years. When she stood erect her fair head was level with the tousled thatch of the McMurray

offspring. Alas, he was paying no heed to her whatever, but kept his vision focused on the trampled field where the chosen youths of Waco had returned to the fray like giants refreshed and were engaged in smashing holes through the straining defense of Fort Hawley.

"You *gotta* hold 'em, boys," snarled Bowman, his fists clenched, every muscle taut. "Wow, Nan, you sunk that pin into me plumb up to the hilt."

"I couldn't help it, Bo," said the sweet, troubled voice. "You won't stand still. What ever possessed you to fight all those policemen? Why can't you keep out of trouble? It's just the same at school."

"I don't start it, do I? For Heaven's sake, Nan, I s'posed you were a friend of mine."

"I am, Bo. That's why I worry about you. It's a pity you dislike girls so. What you need is refining influences. We women admire courage, but you seem to have most too much of it."

"Guess I'm a born woman-hater," was the gloomy admission. "For instance, the idea of your dislikin' football! How can a man understand that?"

"The feminine nature is complex, and you are just plain thick, anyhow," retorted Nancy, "or you'd be a sophomore in high school by this time."

"I bet you'll see me playin' quarter-back a year from now," he boasted.

"Without the slightest interest in culture and education," she sighed. "There, Bo, I've tied up

your elbow and sort of patched you together and I guess I'll go back with the other girls. A lot of your friends are over there."

He ignored the hint, but was sufficiently gracious to mumble: "Thank you, Nan, for takin' an interest in me. I reckon I'll stay here. Somebody else is liable to pick on me if I mix up with the crowd and I've got enough for to-day."

"Three policemen, think of that!" she said in farewell, and the worship of masculine prowess could no longer be suppressed.

"Three is more'n usual," was the lofty comment. "So long, Nan. As girls go, you're the best of the lot."

The grudging compliment was a rich reward for her ministrations and her cheeks were like roses as she moved slowly in the direction of the crowd. Bowman McMurray stared after her for a long moment and this was singularly eloquent, for nothing else could have diverted his attention. Once she was bold enough to turn and wave her hand. He returned the greeting and smiled in a furtive manner as though afraid he might be caught in the act. Recalling the fourth reel of the latest motion picture he had seen, he muttered with unconscious plagiarism:

"Yonder girl will make a fine wife for some worthy young fellow, believe me!"

And then soft-hearted Nancy Overton passed from his mind like an image on the screen as he lost himself in the issues of the struggle for the

high-school championship. It was nip and tuck, almost to the very end when Fort Hawley scored the winning touch-down in the last five minutes. Then the weary but ecstatic Bowman McMurray rushed to the field to join the snake dance and cheer until his voice was a whisper and his eyes popped out. Squirming through the mass of celebrants he managed to shake the captain's hand and wheeze his congratulations. They met as man to man, for Bowman felt that he had done a fair afternoon's work himself.

"Great work, old boy!" said he, "and I saw you do it, tho' I had to lick a bunch of cops between times."

Limping to the gate in the wake of the crowd, he found Mr. Fayette Caldwell waiting just outside. To be taken notice of in this manner was tremendously flattering, and as they turned into a side street the boy expressed his feeling in the query:

"Say, did you see th' picture, 'At the End of the Lonesome Trail'? When Two-Gun Bill Stebbins rescued th' guy from the bandits it was just like your savin' me from the cops. You quelled 'em all right, Mr. Caldwell. I reckon you must have nerves of steel."

"The cops were ridiculous," replied the lawyer. "You may be a great football player some day, Bowman. That is what occurred to me when I saw you in action."

"Honest? Did I really show any class? Of

course I did gain ground through Gilson Givins an' his pardners, but it wasn't like a regular scrimmage."

"You would have been hard to stop on a college field this afternoon," laughed Caldwell. "I never saw anything like it. You are sound in wind and limb, all right."

"An' I'm always goin' to stay that way," was the serious declaration. "No cigarettes or booze or late hours! An athalete has to cut 'em out. Get me?"

"I think I get you, Bowman," just as seriously replied young Mr. Caldwell as he studied the boy with an increasing interest. Here were aspirations of a sort, clean and manly, which were worthy to be fostered. There was fearless candor in the gray eyes which regarded this grown-up friend with a touch of wistfulness, as though life were a battle and such respites as this were few and far between. A square, hard face, but not a tough one; the blood of the Irish race was manifest and it also revealed itself in a temperament emotional and responsive. Fayette Caldwell's own boyhood was not far enough distant to be blurred, and he went on to say:

"You are the leader of the bunch in school, I suppose. And how about the gang in your street? Folks call you a holy terror, do they?"

"Some of 'em do. Sufferin' catfish, I don't want to fight *all* the time, but I got a reputation, an' you'd be s'prised to see how many boys, bigger'n

me, seem to have a kind of ambition to knock my block off. Usually they start it by pesterin' one of the little boys in my crowd, an' I can't allow that, can I? You *gotta* do your duty in this world, Mr. Caldwell."

To the lawyer was vouchsafed the sympathy to perceive that, although the neighborhood might condemn this turbulent youngster as a nuisance, he was at heart a knight errant. And old-fashioned ideas of chivalry are apt to find a rocky road in the modern social order. They chatted about life in general for some time, and then Caldwell asked:

"Why were you set back in high school? What's the matter?"

"The loose foot, suh," grinned Bowman. "You know what I mean. It ketches me once in a while. Then I jes' naturally drift. All last year I was a tourist. Workin' at what? Oh, on a beef ranch for a while, an' drivin' tent pegs for a Chautauqua show, an' stable hand for a stage route,—a little of 'most everything. I reckon I was a plain hobo. I'll bet you couldn't beat your way home from Montana on the blind baggage an' the brake-beams. I learned that from the blanket stiffs that follow the wheat harvestin'."

"Now, listen to me, Bowman," sternly spoke the astonished Caldwell. "You must hobble that loose foot except in summer-time. Unless you promise, I won't waste my time on you. You think more of football than anything else, you tell me."

"Indeed I do. I was captain of the grammar-school team, but the material was something fierce."

"I'll come around to see you play to-morrow. I was the full-back for three years on my college eleven."

"Gee mighty, Mr. Caldwell? Where was that at? A real college player? An' I thought you were nothing but a lawyer."

"In Kentucky, where I came from. I married a Fort Hawley girl."

"I know," said Bowman. "Your wife was Miss Sallie Barbee. Her kid brother played left guard on my grammar school team an' he was perfectly rotten."

"Well, we can't all be great men," chuckled Caldwell. "Why don't you go to college, boy? Never thought of it, I presume."

"Dream on," scoffed Bowman.

"Your folks ever mention it? Would they help you?"

"Not me, suh. Th' best they hope for is that I'll keep out of jail an' cinch a steady job in the car shops. It's an awful big family, Mr. Caldwell. It's up to me to rustle for myself."

"That doesn't prevent you from going to college. You think I am talking through my hat?"

"Sounds like your skylight *is* open," agreed Bowman. "Me play football on a regular college team? Don't disturb the patient, doctor! He is enjoyin' his delusions!"

They parted in front of Caldwell's house, and for several minutes after the door closed, Bowman McMurray stood lost in thought. Then he limped homeward and might have been heard to mutter, with an expressive gesture:

"Some afternoon! I stood off three cops an' met a perfect gentleman. When ma sees my clothes an' dad sees my nose—never mind, I'll tell 'em I was preparin' for college."

CHAPTER II

NANCY OVERTON HAS A BIRTHDAY

As long as two young people can be as happy together as were Fayette and Sallie Caldwell, marriage cannot be counted a total failure. They were the infatuated parents of an infant prodigy which had been christened in its father's name, but was inscrutably known as "Scooch." They had a small income and a wee cottage, for even the most brilliant of lawyers, as Sallie knew him to be, has to get a toe-hold, but they steered clear of debt and envied nobody.

At supper he told her of his adventure with that armored cruiser, Bowman McMurray, who was always cleared for action. Sallie was still a brown, vivacious slip of a girl not long out of her teens and she knew all about boys. Heaven knows how many of their gallant young Texan hearts she had broken when she was so light of foot, so fancy free. Fayette was interested and therefore she felt eager to assist.

"I am so glad you have taken a liking to that boy," exclaimed Sallie. "The women cackle about him like a lot of frightened hens. But you ought to hear my small brother Rufus rave about Bo McMurray! 'The niftiest football cap'n that ever wore a cleat,' says Rufe, 'and a dead game sport.'

That means a good deal, a sense of honor and the right kind of courage."

"That was my impression of him, honey. I can't believe he is a bad influence. He has been allowed to run wild, but, at that, his morals and his manners are a heap sight better than you'll find among the well-dressed young loafers in the pool-room of the Plaza Hotel. I took a shine to this boy, Sallie. What is his home like?"

"He has a splendid mother, and Rufe says Bo just swears by her, but they are really poor, with five little McMurrays besides this boy. He simply has had to shift for himself, though they never meant to neglect him, I'm sure."

"I know Tom McMurray," said Caldwell. "Big-hearted and husky and a first-class mechanic. They are not educated people, of course."

"They might not qualify for the Fort Hawley smart set. Rufe is a sincere little gossip and he vows that Nan Overton is sweet on Bo."

"John Overton's daughter, the pretty blonde one? One of our first families, even if John did make his money in the stockyards! There *is* a society scandal for you!"

"I was madly in love with a barber when I was sixteen," sweetly observed Sallie, "and I mighty near eloped with him. He had dreamy eyes and serenaded me with his guitar at boarding-school."

"The only reason he escaped killing was because I didn't come along sooner," hotly declared the Kentucky lover. "Do you mind if I step around

to the McMurrays for a few minutes? I am sort of playin' a hunch."

"And you pine for quick action," drawled Sallie. "That's how you stole me. You never could wait. Football got you going this time."

"That's part of it," said Fayette as he kissed her adieu. "If you could have seen this bunch of dynamite mix it up with the three cops—maybe I've found a star. I used to pick 'em pretty well when I was captain of my college team. And this may be the only way to get a hold on the boy."

Caldwell sauntered into a sandy, rambling street at the edge of Fort Hawley. The frame houses were close together, set behind picket fences. It was not a mean street, but the fact was obvious that the attractive residential quarter of the town had spread over a different area. Fort Hawley was, in fact, a city of ten thousand people and of quite recent growth. Its reason for being was the junction of two important railroad systems and the prosperity was largely industrial, while it was also the marketing and mercantile centre for the rich black farming lands that surrounded it. There was a Chamber of Commerce which boosted vociferously. Money was easily earned and carelessly spent. Fort Hawley mourned not the lack of history and traditions. It was too busy making them.

No expert social workers had yet analyzed, charted, and organized the town according to its needs and "groups." Perhaps this was why

Bowman McMurray had been overlooked. He disturbed the existing order of things, but nobody had tried to find out why. This occurred to Fayette Caldwell as he knocked at the McMurray portal. A buxom woman invited him in, but her cheery smile vanished and the rosy cheek paled as she exclaimed:

"'Tis Mr. Caldwell, the lawyer! What trouble is it now, I wonder! Sit down, if you please, and I will call Tom. You will be wanting him, I suppose. He is swapping a bit of talk with a neighbor across the back fence yonder."

Her beautiful serenity, which had withstood so much toil and anxiety, was seriously distraught. Caldwell pitied her and hastened to say:

"It is after office hours, Mrs. McMurray, so I am a neighbor, not a lawyer. Tom will be coming in directly. Don't bother to call him."

The door into the kitchen was ajar and he caught a glimpse of Bowman which was more eloquent than anything the mother could have said in his favor. Perched upon a stool at the sink was the boy terror, an apron tied around him, while he washed the supper dishes. On the table beside him sat a younger McMurray and another stood propped against the sink. They were perfectly quiet, in a kind of trance, for Bowman had jammed an open book behind the faucets of the water-taps and his voice could be heard above the careless clatter of the crockery in the suds.

When midnight came and the Gi-ant thought the Tailor would be in a deep sleep, he got up, and taking a great iron bar, beat the bed right through at one stroke, and supposed he had thereby given the Tailor his death-blow. At the earliest dawn of morning the Gi-ants went forth into the for-est, quite for-getting the Tailor, when pre-sently up he came, quite merry, and showed himself before them. The Gi-ants were terrified and fearing he would kill them all, they ran away in great haste.

The reader broke off his epic to look for a dish-towel, and one of the audience piped up:

"Gorry, Bo, I betcher them Gi-unts 'ud beat it if *you* got after 'em. Wouldn't they, Jennie?"

"I wish Bo had that Tailor on his football team," breathlessly cried the little maid.

Mrs. McMurray closed the kitchen door upon the fascinated group, who had not heard the visitor enter. Easily moved, the mother wiped her eyes as she said:

"'Tis that kind of a boy he is, Mr. Caldwell, tho' the town wouldn't believe it. He would sooner save me steps than be runnin' about at night. The sight of you upset me, and that's the truth, for Bowman is not a liar, and when I asked what mussed him up to-day he said it was a fight with a police-man."

"I saw it, Mrs. McMurray, and I took the boy's end of it. There's nothing to worry about. In fact, I was so pleased with him that I came around to get better acquainted."

"Praise God for that, Mr. Caldwell," she ex-

claimed with a smile that was pure sunshine. "'Tis hard to believe that Bowman has made a friend like yourself. A mother has her own sorrows to bear and one of them is that her children lose the hold of her two hands. Here comes Tom, now. He will be pleased to see you."

She slipped into the hall and whispered in her husband's ear a hurried explanation. With genial courtesy, the brawny, black-browed mechanic offered his hand to Fayette Caldwell and exclaimed:

"The wife tells me good news. A kind word for the boy is like gold to her. And how is the lovely little lady that you put the comether on?"

"I'm still wondering how I did it, Tom. And if you're the man I think you are, you feel the same way."

"You're a sensible young man, Mr. Caldwell. Now if Bowman had only taken after his blessed mother—but th' heredity took a wrong slant. I was a two-fisted, fightin' fool of a boy that felt lonesome without trouble for company."

"Tom, be still," chided his wife. "We will have none of your wild stories. A fine example of a father you are. 'Tis the wakeness of some good men, Mr. Caldwell, to brag of what terrible lads they were once upon a time."

"And now a woman makes me tremble with a word," said Tom McMurray, with a laugh that rolled deep and hearty from his big chest. "Take Bowman, now. Give a young dog a bad name,

eh? There is mischief in him now and again, but never a dirty streak. You know what I mean. There was the time that our neighbor Harry Hatch, the carpenter, busted his leg when he fell off a roof. The boys got up what they called a benefit —a circus, understand—and were sellin' tickets for a dime, as busy as grasshoppers. Bowman was th' instigator, of course. Old Jed Shreve that lives in the next block, and a tight-wad he is, refused to loosen up for even one ticket and chased the kids out of his yard. Well, anyhow, when he came out one mornin', there was a big silver dollar shining on the sidewalk right in front of his gate. Old Jed dove for it, and dropped it. They heard him yell clean over in Smoky Hollow where the niggers live. Bowman had heated the silver dollar in the kitchen stove and toted it over on the fire-shovel. The old man always starts for the post-office at nine o'clock precisely."

"Did the boy own up to it?" asked Caldwell.

"Yes, and I walloped him. He said he'd bet the other kids that he could make Jed Shreve let go of a dollar. 'Twas a safe bet that time."

"What about his wandering off last year, Tom? Is he liable to do it again?"

"Not if he stays this year in high school. The football will hold him after that. And perhaps you won't mind lending us a hand with him."

"That's why I'm here, Tom. You don't have to tell me anything more. I guessed right this afternoon."

The kitchen door opened and Bowman demurely stole into the room and found a seat in the corner. He was used to hearing himself discussed. This had long since ceased to embarrass him. The presence of Mr. Fayette Caldwell was tremendously exciting, but the boy had learned a self-repression which was curiously mature. When lost in his own thoughts he seemed almost stoical. And so he sat and beamed at Mr. Fayette Caldwell until his mother said:

"Did you put the two children to bed, Bowman?"

"Yes'm. Bud kicked on sayin' his prayers till I crawled under the cot to see if there was any Gi-ants there, but I tucked 'em both in."

"If your mother can spare you, Bowman," said Caldwell, "I'd like to have you come to my house for supper Friday. We can talk football and college and I'll show you the pictures of my teams."

"Of course he'll be there," gratefully exclaimed Tom McMurray, "if I have to buy him a new suit of clothes. 'Twould save money if I could dress him in tin and button him up with a solderin'-iron."

Mrs. McMurray stammered her thanks with a quivering lip and accents that broke in spite of her. The good God had heard her petitions. It was like a shining miracle that such a dear man as this should step from his own pathway to intercede in the problem of her boy whom other people had never tried to understand. Bowman followed into the hall and said, confidentially:

"This will do 'em more good than a barrel of money, Mr. Caldwell. It takes an old athalete like you to size things up. Much obliged, for everything."

In this manner, quite by chance, was young Bowman McMurray given an opportunity to divert his abounding energy into channels less obstructed with shoals and driftwood. To claim that he instantly became a pattern of propriety and an exemplary student would be absurd. But he had discerned afar off a goal undreamed of. If the love of football was not the loftiest motive in the world, it was nevertheless a lever to pry with and an influence touched by nothing ignoble. Fayette Caldwell would have laughed at the notion that he had been drawn into it by a sense of duty. It was like the pleasure which the good artisan feels in shaping and finishing a bit of precious metal in accordance with a certain design.

Bowman fell into the habit of dropping in to talk things over, sometimes at the law office in the brick block, again at the house in the evening. He had the knack of making himself unobtrusive on such occasions, of waiting for the opportune moment. He was never under foot. Sallie Caldwell made the important discovery that the infant prodigy, miscalled "Scooch," had found a buddy after his own heart. It was Bowman who volunteered to take charge in the nursery while Sallie went out now and then to a card party, a dance, or a concert.

"And I don't feel a mite of anxiety," she told Fayette. "I simply couldn't leave Scooch with a triflin' yellow girl. He simply yells for 'Bo, Bo,' and that's all there is to it."

Bowman gravely explained it to Caldwell.

"I'm used to 'em. And he can't help likin' a football player. It's born in him. If he wakes up and gets fretty, I sing to him, and he holds my thumb an' pops off to sleep. Say, he's got a grip on him."

If the boy had been stupid or slow to learn, Caldwell might have tired of the task, but now that there was something definite to strive for, Bowman attacked his school-books with a vigor which puzzled and amazed the teachers. He proposed to waste no more time. The big stunt was to get into college as soon as possible. The football season ended with the autumn term, and the rest of the year was a long, drudging road, but the new tenacity of purpose carried him along. His visions of college life were fed by motion pictures and story books obtained at the public library. The fortunate youths always wore snappy clothes and spent their time in singing close harmonies, "rushing" each other for fraternities, or playing hob with the professors. This appealed to the sensible Bowman as frivolous stuff. As he knew it, life was a serious affair. However, Fayette Caldwell noticed that he was more careful about his appearance and less inclined to fight at the drop of the hat. It was discovered—and this

was immensely vital—that with some extra study and tutoring which Caldwell was delighted to promise, Bowman could probably save a year of the high-school course. Nothing more was needed to spur him to fiery and unflagging industry.

It was late in the spring when a sentimental episode provoked the last of the memorable battles he fought in Fort Hawley. The woman in the case was that angel of mercy with the golden braids, Nancy Overton, whose first aid to the injured had been so thanklessly bestowed when her hero had engaged three policemen, which was "more'n usual." Since that great moment, Bowman had been polite, even kind, in a condescending way, but it could not be said that he displayed the slightest symptoms of devotion.

The parents of Nancy elected to honor her birthday by means of an evening dancing party in what was known as the Overton mansion on the Parkway. It was the intention to limit the invitations to the nicest boys and girls, whose families were numbered among the socially elect of Fort Hawley, but Nancy mutinied at the exclusion of several of her very best school friends, and among these she haughtily submitted the name of Cap'n Bowman McMurray. Alas, he had not yet lived down his reputation as an enemy of all society, and there was a tempest in the Overton household until Nancy delivered her ultimatum. It was no Bowman, no party.

Happily ignorant that he had been a bone of

contention, Bowman heated an iron and pressed his black suit with his own competent hands while the younger McMurrays struggled for the honor of shining his shoes. To the mother it was a reward of merit, a distinguished event, but she warned her sturdy son, as he faced the mirror with his black hair brushed as smooth as a seal's:

"I am not ashamed of your manners, Bowman, but you must mind that temper of yours."

"When have I punched anybody, ma? Only once since Christmas an' it simply had to be done. I'm so peaceful that it hurts."

Sallie Caldwell had taught him to dance and was proud of her pupil. He swayed to the witchery of music like a leaf in the wind, and he had the natural athlete's control of muscle and nerve, the coördination which is occasionally found even during the puppy years of youth. It was a solid, wholesome-looking boy who trudged up to the Overton Mansion and halted to stare at the lighted windows. His heart was thumping, but he was outwardly composed. His brief years had compassed many varied scenes and places.

Courteously he remembered to pay his respects to the chaperons, as Sallie Caldwell had coached him to do, and these formidable ladies greeted him with more formality than graciousness. Unsmiling, the observant Bowman remarked to Mrs. Overton:

"A chilly evenin' for May, ma'am. I didn't notice it till I got over into this corner. Can I get you a shawl or something?"

Perhaps she saw the twinkle in his eye. At any rate, she was disarmed and displayed more cordiality as she answered:

"That serves me right! So this is the great Captain Bo McMurray! Nan tells me you are a very loyal champion. Now run along and enjoy yourself."

"Fair and warmer, thank you, Mrs. Overton," said the guest. "Are you engaged for the first dance?"

"Bless your heart, Bowman, that would be cruel and unusual punishment for you. I do believe I have found a courtier. Do they still exist?"

"I just can't realize you are old enough to be Nan's mother, Mrs. Overton," was the parting tribute with which the courtier bowed and sauntered across the floor.

Many of the boys and girls were of the high-school crowd slightly older than Bowman and his friends, and several lordly youths wore dinner coats. Even these eyed the stocky figure of the notorious McMurray with a certain respect. His prowess and his exploits were not unknown, and he was a seasoned man of the world who had been a roving hobo just for the fun of it and could boast of such fascinating chums as "Kansas Slim" and "San Antone Blackie."

Dutifully Bowman danced with this girl and that, bored but dissembling it, until lovely Nancy Overton was kind enough to find time for him. It was ruffling to observe that she preferred a long, lithe lad in blue serge who was a total stranger to the

scowling Bowman. Jealousy was a novel emotion. This captivating outsider had the high cheek-bones, the sallow complexion, the steadfast, sombre gaze of the native Texan raised among the wide spaces. His limber legs were already a trifle bowed as though accustomed to the stock saddle. One missed the jingle of spurs as he danced. Fort Hawley was a mixture of people from many states, regions, and climes. You might call it cosmopolitan, but this soft-spoken, resolute boy was stamped as a son of the Lone Star State.

When at length Bowman deftly swung Nancy to the lilt of the fiddles and the horn, he tried to make the impatient question sound quite casual.

"Who is the fresh guy,—'scuse me, Nan,—the dashin' young gentleman that has monop'lized most of your attention? I don't remember him anywheres. Old friend of yours, may I ask?"

Nancy flashed an upward glance, swift, appraising. There was that in Bowman's face which led her to surmise that the implacable woman-hater had begun to weaken. Thus had he glowered at the retreating policemen.

"Len Garretson?" she lightly answered. "Oh, yes, indeed. I met him quite a while ago, several times. It seems like years. The rest of his name is Leonard. Awfully nice boy, isn't he? *So* quiet and refined."

"I hadn't noticed it," was the petulant comment. "Where's he live? How come he to bust into this party?"

"Why, Bo, you s'prise me. I have been hearing such excellent reports of you," chided Nancy. "Len's father runs a beef herd on the old B-Y Ranch, fifty miles from here. And Len drove all that way in a flivver just to come to my party. My father is a director of The Stockmen's National Bank, I s'pose you know, and that's how our families got acquainted. I'll introduce you directly. You're sure to like Len. He's *so* manly for his age!"

"Much obliged, Nan," stiffly answered Bowman, desperately holding fast to his good manners, although he felt himself slipping. At this crucial moment the playful gods decreed that the objectionable "Len" Garretson should sidle up in his easy, loose-jointed manner and drawl:

"May I cut in, Miss Overton?"

The request should have been aimed at her partner, as Nancy was quick to note, and she suspected that "Len" knew better. Bowman's social training had not included this punctilio, but he disliked the interruption and sensed a challenge in the manner of it. His demeanor was dignified and icy as he exclaimed:

"It's my dance, *Mister* Garretson. Seems tho' you ought to be rode with a curb."

Nancy's smile was a little tremulous as she gazed at her two suitors. It was like a scene from a novel she had recently read. Alas, her beauty had aroused the angry passions of these two elemental men! Her position was enviable, but excessively

disturbing. She wished she had not trifled with the feelings of Cap'n "Bo" McMurray. With a faint smile and an air wholly self-possessed, young Garretson remarked to his rival:

"Better not start something you can't finish. They're used to breakin' outlaws where I come from. If you please, Miss Overton."

He was about to waft her away in his arms, but the golden girl evaded him. The dilemma frightened her. Bowman was openly truculent, and he was liable to ruin a perfectly wonderful party. No boy had ever dared to defy him like this. After a moment's hesitation she cut the Gordian knot by announcing:

"I don't believe I really care for the rest of this dance. I think I feel a little faint. Please escort me to a chair by a window, both of you. I never saw anything so silly!"

Her word was law. Grimly Bowman stalked on the one side while Leonard Garretson lounged along on the other. Nancy thanked them sweetly and the McMurray faithfully copied the suave and courtly manner of Fayette Caldwell as he assured her:

"You needn't be a mite scared of my beginnin' anything in the presence of a lady. If I don't happen to see you again, Miss Overton, I've had a delightful time an' thank you so much."

"Why, what do you mean, Bo?" she cried. "You're going to dance some more and, of course, you wouldn't miss the refreshments."

"I've got an engagement, a temp'rary one. I may be back," he replied, with a black glance at the hated Garretson boy.

"I reckon you'll be detained," calmly observed "Len." "If you'll please save me a couple more dances, Miss Overton, I can sho'ly promise to be on deck."

They left her in a mood bereft of speech, staring distressfully after them as they moved out of the parlor together and passed into the soft and starry night. As by a mutual impulse they strolled toward the lawn behind the garage. It was a secluded spot. Young Garretson was rolling a cigarette as he gently suggested:

"If you want to apologize, it'll save you a heap of trouble, McMurray."

"What for? That's up to you," was the bitter retort. "You delib'rately set out to see how far you could crowd me. A gen'leman would have some respect for a lady's feelin's."

"No town mucker can show me anything, just because he's got a fightin' reputation," exclaimed the lad from the cow country.

The insult was passed. There could be no drawing back. Stubbornly but sadly the McMurray rejoined, as he peeled off his best coat:

"Seems like they won't leave me alone. I can't take talk like that from this bench-legged, four-flushin' kid of a cow-puncher."

CHAPTER III

M'MURRAY HAS A SURPRISE PARTY

As Bowman regarded it, here was a disagreeable task which had been forced upon him and he would get it out of the way as soon as possible. He had lost his love of fistic battle for its own sake, thanks to the influence of Fayette Caldwell, who had convinced him that great football players were notable for self-restraint under provocation. And more than this, the habit clashed with certain ideals of conduct which more and more dominated the boy. There were times, however, when one had to teach somebody to mind his own business, and this was quite evidently such an instance. "Len" Garretson was troubled by no such moral conflict. His intentions were sincere and single-minded.

The veteran McMurray stood poised upon those strong, springy legs of his and warily feinted for the first blow. His was the rough-and-tumble school of encounter which was designed to smother the opponent in the fashion of a land-slide. It was brilliantly exemplified in the disaster which had befallen Policeman Gilson Givins. In accordance with the tactics which had triumphed on many a hard-fought field, Bowman intended to close in for a clinch after the first wild flurry of fists.

The plan had a flaw unlooked for. The limber

Garretson lad was not where Bowman's fists expected to find him. He trod the turf lightly, stepping back a little or turning aside to dodge the attack. This was a defense so novel to Bowman's experience that he began to let his temper get the better of his seasoned judgment. Both arms swinging, he rushed in and stopped so suddenly that his feet seemed to fly out from under him. His jaw had collided with some obstruction. It jarred him painfully and his amazement was beyond words. He found himself sitting down and blinking dizzily.

Taller by inches and with a longer reach, "Len" Garretson seemed reluctant to let himself be all mussed up. He was finicky about it, absolutely unreasonable. Bowman, of course, flew up from the grass almost as soon as he hit it and sailed in again. One punch might knock him off his stout pins, but it was not apt to discourage him. This time the bench-legged young cow-puncher stepped forward. He was no longer coy and elusive. Bowman lowered his chin and threw up a left guard, trying to make use of what little science he could recall to mind. "Len" laughed and let drive with his right. It shot home with a thud.

In his trusting childhood years, a little nigger boy had once told Bowman that every mule had a piece of gold in the bottom of its hind hoof. He had promptly tried to retrieve a bit of this buried treasure and was kicked clean over the corral fence. Curious, but this unhappy memory popped into his

thoughts as he sat down again and rubbed a bruise on his cheek. Humiliation was mixed with a kind of awed respect for the amazing "Len" Garretson boy whose appearance was so dreadfully deceptive. The style of fighting which had swept a swath through Fort Hawley was of no avail. Bowman McMurray knew that unless his foeman tripped over his own feet or got a cramp in his stomach, somebody would surely be licked to a frazzle and his name began with "Bo."

This one-sided combat had been waged without words. It was a swift and violent pantomime. Playing his trump card, the football warrior now dived head-foremost with the intention of wrapping his arms about "Len's" slim waist and spilling him upside down. It was almost successful. The Garretson kid was taken unawares. Having knocked his man down twice, he naturally expected him to stay put for a moment or so. The error was excusable. He had never before taken on a McMurray.

There was a terrific impact, a grunt, a tussle, and the limber "Len" was lifted off the ground to slide across Bowman's shoulder and land all sprawled out. There was feline grace and quickness in the raw-boned young frame, and before Bowman could pin him, he was upon his hands and knees. In the dusky starlight they bumped head-on like two rams. The effect was stunning, as one might say, and it slowed down the performance. Bowman's agility was much below par and Garretson delayed to feel the top of his head and find the cracks.

Thus they happened to keep clear of each other and slowly, uncertainly to regain their feet. Bowman's wits were muddled. He was at a loss how to renew the conflict. The Garretson boy was in no better plight. His head spun like a top. But his skill as a boxer had become intuitive. With knees that wobbled he advanced and hit straight and clean with both hands, *biff, bang!* The McMurray dropped before he could set himself to meet it. The victor spoke in accents weary but menacing.

"How many more times have I got to do it? Show some sense and quit."

"I never did quit, but I can't seem to get up," admitted Bowman as though sorely perplexed. "My old legs are all numbed up."

"Then you're whipped, are you?"

"I reckon I am. Guess I'd better rest a spell. How's the bean? Mine aches somethin' fierce."

"Same here. She was some collision. I figure that I'd better walk around to the kitchen and wash up. A little thing like this can't interfere with my next dance with Miss Nancy Overton."

Bowman winced, but took his medicine. The Garretson boy had a perfect right to make him swallow the dose. The only comment was:

"Of course you'll tell her. That's all right. Listen, where did you learn to pack a punch like that? You're a regular darn pug'list."

"There was a broken-down light-weight fighter stayed at the ranch all last summer. He had a

bum lung an' dad let him putter round at chores. He showed me a lot, an' when he quit he said I was quite promisin' for a kid."

"Those weren't promises you walloped me with," sighed the fallen McMurray.

Young Garretson was leisurely wiping his face with a handkerchief, and with no more remarks he strolled toward the rear of the house. Still prone on the grass, Bowman clasped his hands behind his head and gazed up at the serene, mysterious stars. It was unbelievable that a boy could be as unhappy as he was. The deepest source of his woe was not that he had been, for the first time, whipped in a fair fight. This was almost inconsequential now that his anger had cooled. His heart had not been in it or else he would have tried to endure more punishment, hung to it like a bull-dog until he was knocked insensible.

The catastrophe was ever so much greater than this. Nancy Overton's party was to have been his test and his vindication, a milestone on the steep highway which he aspired to climb day by day. And how had he behaved? Like a rowdy and a mucker, like the old "Bo" McMurray of the grammar-school bunch and the street gang, as public opinion had regarded him. A boy that hoped to go to college, who was ambitious to be a scholar, an athlete, and a gentleman! His soul was bruised far worse than his swollen eye and throbbing jaw.

He pulled himself together and walked slowly in the direction of the street light at the corner.

There were grass-stains on his best black suit, but no serious damage. He did not wish to go home until all the family were in bed. For some time he moped in the shadows not far from the Overton mansion and listened to the music that was borne to him through the open windows. Finally he shook his head with a hopeless air and rambled off to stop at a drug-store and buy a small bottle of arnica. Then as he reluctantly turned homeward he might have been heard to mutter:

"Gee mighty, but women do make a heap of trouble in this world! I'm off 'em for keeps."

Out of bed early next morning, as was his habit, he lugged in enough wood to fill the box by the kitchen stove and helped two or three younger McMurrays into their clothes. Luckily his father had been sent for at daylight to boss an emergency repair job in the car shops. It was not until all hands were rounded up at the breakfast table that the busy mother found leisure for a chat with the downcast Bowman. The marks on his face instantly caught her attention, and instead of the glad, eager interest, she dreaded to ask him a question. The boy was in one of his taciturn moods, in the black shadow of poignant self-reproach. He read his mother's troubled heart and briefly informed her:

"Yes'm, I was in a scrap last night. I'm sorry. I was lookin' for trouble. An' I got it, plenty."

"Did you disgrace yourself at the party, Bowman?" she faltered.

"No, ma. It happened outside. My best clothes are all right. I didn't tear 'em at all. I reckon I was all right in th' house, 'cause Nan Overton's mother paid me a mighty nice compliment on my manners."

"'Twas after the party, Bowman, that you yielded to your besetting sin?"

"Well, I quit early, after dancin' with Nan. Please don't scold. I'm in a terrible state of mind, believe me."

"I won't scold," she mourned, "but, oh, I'm bitter disappointed. And who was the lad you mixed it with?"

"A bad kid from the grass-roots, ma. He was honin' for it an' I might have ducked th' argument, but I didn't. He licked the tar out of me."

"That's one blessing, anyhow," said Mrs. McMurray, not quite so tragically. "'Tis a pity it didn't happen long ago. No, I will not scold, Bowman. I know you too well for that. You're a lad that will always suffer cruel torment when you think you have done wrong. But, oh, the shame of it! And folks talkin' about it by now!"

"Prob'ly. That Len Garretson couldn't help braggin' that he trimmed Bo McMurray."

"And what will Mr. Fayette Caldwell say to you?"

"That's the worst of it, ma. You simply can't 'preciate how worse it is. I shouldn't be s'prised if it busts up our friendship. I'm going round to see him an' Miss' Sallie this evenin' after school, but I'd ruther let Len Garretson pound me again."

The mother wept a little, dried her eyes, and betook herself to her manifold tasks. Bowman doggedly marched off to school as though he were about to face a firing squad. To his astonishment, neither friend nor foe had heard of the affair on the lawn behind the Overton garage. This was quite obvious, because otherwise he would have been both an object of sympathy and a target for derision. Nancy Overton was a grade ahead of him, in her second year of high school, and sequestered in an adjacent building with a high board fence between. For this Bowman was profoundly grateful. He expected never to meet her again. Their lives had been sundered. It seemed plausible to infer that "Len" Garretson had kept his mouth shut, instead of bragging about his great deed. This was so admirable that Bowman could not feel revengeful. He was ready to pronounce his adversary "a dead game sport," than which there could be no higher encomium.

His melancholy lifted a little during the day, but the clouds rolled down again when he dragged his feet through the gate of the Caldwell cottage. It was late in the afternoon and Sallie had not returned from giving "Scooch" a joy-ride in the baby carriage. Fayette opened the door and Bowman very meekly followed him into the little library with its littered desk and crowded bookshelves. Nervously clapping a hand to his discolored eye, the boy edged into a chair and coughed several times before he managed to blurt:

"Looks like it's all off, Mr. Caldwell. I'm not fit to go to college. Much obliged for all the interest an' kindness you have showed in me, but—"

"Stop it, Bo! Why the farewell address?" shouted the guardian of manners and morals. "Now start it right end to and don't talk so fast."

"Yes, suh, Mr. Caldwell," was the obedient reply. Fumbling with his cap, the culprit began to tell the story, very painstakingly and gulping now and then. The confessor listened like a judge on the bench, but he had never been quite so fond of the boy. As the narrative neared its halting, heart-broken finish, the verdict was shaping itself, and it was not in the least what Bowman expected. The protégé's unswerving honesty was what appealed most strongly to Caldwell. His hands in his pockets, he lounged back in the desk chair and gazed at the huddled, disconsolate figure as he said, with a frown and a smile:

"Pretty rotten, Bo, I must say. You were a bad actor. Pranced into that swell party with a chip on your shoulder and got your face pushed. Served you right! Ever hear about the pitcher that went once too often to the well?"

"Was he in the Texas League, Mr. Caldwell? I s'pose he got bumped. I'd kind of like to get through with this interview before Miss' Sallie an' Scooch come in. Sayin' good-bye to that baby will come mighty hard, but of course I can't ride herd on him any more. He's been my little old side-pardner."

"Nonsense, Bo. Why punish Scooch for your sins? That blessed infant hasn't been putting over any rough stuff. You'll stay to supper and then sing him to sleep with that fool tune of yours, '*Nigger, Your Heels is Burnin'*.'"

Bowman brightened, but he had nothing more to say until Caldwell observed:

"Apparently I wouldn't have heard of this ruction if you hadn't come here and spilled it. It hasn't leaked out at school, you tell me."

"I had to tell *you*," insisted Bowman.

"A point of honor, son? Playing the game? I get you. Well, I feel sure you won't cut loose at the next party. So much for that. What do you expect to do with yourself this summer? Vacation is almost here and you haven't told me yet."

"I won't stay in Fort Hawley, Mr. Caldwell. I had pretty near made up my mind, and this—this unfort'nate affair cinches it. There's one or two people I'd ruther not meet, if I see 'em first an'—say, have I *gotta* make a party call at the Overtons'?"

"You might postpone it until September without queering your social status. Will that make it easier?"

"Maybe. Anyhow, I want to break away from my regular bunch. I reckon I'll go to work for an old snoozer named Tom Jaycox over Pecan River way. He's a cattle-man I rode fence for a little while that time I hobo'd it. He asked me to come back an' said I was a right smart kid."

"I know who Jaycox is," said Caldwell. "I searched a title for him. You will be in good hands, Bo. Aim to take some books along with you?"

"I sure do, if you'll kind of map it out for me. I want to save my money, Mr. Caldwell, to buy my own clothes an' things."

"Fine business. And you will be as hard as nails when the football season opens."

"I'm not what you call soft, right now. Please, if you don't mind, I'll see Miss' Sallie s'mother evenin'. Will you explain it to her an' Scooch? Your letting me down so easy has made me liable to cry. You know how it is."

"I do, Bo. Make it to-morrow night, then. And put a piece of raw steak on that funny eye of yours."

"Then we're still friends, Mr. Caldwell?" was the anxious query.

"Absolutely, Bo. But don't do it again."

June came swiftly, and just before Bowman McMurray was ready to depart for the Pecan River region, he strolled under cover of night past the Overton mansion which was, in fact, a comfortable, square brick house with tall white pillars upholding the portico. Moonlight silvered the roof and the air was heavy with the scent of roses. Through a window was disclosed the fair image of Nancy Overton at the piano and her braided hair, so thick and lustrous. Bowman looked and listened, but not for long. He could endure only

so much. Wrenching himself away, he resumed his errant course and said to himself:

"An' so that lovely young creature will marry Len Garretson. A manly lad! I wish them well. Gee, it might have been different if—"

Such introspections as these could not linger to stab the temperamental soul of the McMurray. He was, above all else, a man of action, and life was too interesting to play the rôle of a blighted hero. Presently he was rattling across the landscape of Texas in an accommodation train which dropped him off at a hamlet consisting of a dog-hut of a station, a water-tank, and one store. With a blanket-roll on his shoulder he footed it four miles to the Dry Creek Ranch and was cordially greeted by old man Jaycox, gnarled, wind-bitten, leathery, with a voice that shook the bunk-house windows.

"Th' little ol' Fort Hawley kid!" he boomed. "I can afford to pay you wages, but when it comes to feedin' you—why, boy, the cook shuddered when I told him you was headin' this way. His recollections of them holler legs of yourn is some acute. Want to work steady this time, you wrote me."

"Yes, suh, till school opens. I've decided to go to college."

"College?" roared the old-timer. "Ruin the makin's of a good cowman? Bo, you had more hoss sense than most men. Now you talk flighty."

"I'll explain it to you some time soon," was

the dignified response. "Where do I hang up my hat?"

"Same ol' place. The men'll be glad to see you. You can chop wood an' make yourself handy for a week or so. Then I'll put you in a saddle an' let you perambulate the barb-wire for a spell. College? Huh! Wear turned-up pants an' too lazy to roll your own cigaroots. How old be you, Bo?"

"Sixteen, Mr. Jaycox, and stout for my age."

"But you show symptoms of weakness in th' head. Maybe you can outgrow it, like wobbly hocks. Hop along, now. Let the cook know the worst."

A fortnight after this, Bowman was skirting the southerly boundary of a rolling pasture of several thousand acres, with a good pony under him and a cool breeze fanning his tanned cheek. He sang as he rode and all his cares and troubles seemed a world away. Again he heard the call of the open road, and felt the lure of the loose foot. Working toward a corner of the pasture, he discovered broken wire and several rotten posts flat on the ground. The boggy soil revealed the tracks of a few steers which had escaped through the gap and after mending the fence he set out to follow them.

Soon the trail became fainter until it vanished, but he let the pony jog toward a distant hill which swelled like an undulation of the sea. Reaching this vantage-point he halted to sweep the country with a pair of glasses, but there was never a glimpse of strayed cattle. To the southward of

where he was ran the Rio Grande, no more than ten miles away, and the spirit of the vagrant explorer led him to ride in that direction, just because it was a region new to him.

He idled along, intending soon to turn and drift back toward the ranch. And now he descried another rider who was approaching from the westward, also in a leisurely manner. Bowman changed his course to look him over, as he had been instructed to do when out on a fence patrol. If a stranger, he was to be checked up and accounted for, particularly when broken wire had been found and cattle were out of pasture.

The lone rider advanced without hesitation, now projected in graceful silhouette against the sky-line, again dipping into a small swale or hollow. Bowman stood in his stirrups and shielded his eyes with his hand. Suddenly his set, alert expression relaxed, but it could not have been called friendly. The recognition appeared to disturb him. Scowling, he watched the wayfarer pull his horse to a walk and wave his broad hat. He was a long, limber lad with a lean face and an aspect of mild melancholy. Just now there was a trace of an amused smile as he rode up to Bowman and exclaimed:

"Howdy, McMurray! First time we've met since the party. What's your outfit?"

"Garretson, I believe," was the dignified response. "Where did you breeze from? I'm summerin' with old man Jaycox at Dry Creek."

"That so? I live a piece beyond there. I just rambled out this morning on the chance of finding a deer and kept shovin' along."

Bowman had noticed the rifle slung on his back and was gracious enough to inquire:

"Any luck? I'm sort of wanderin' after a few strays."

"Nary a deer. And I didn't see any of the Jaycox stuff either. Headed home, are you?"

"I reckon so, tho' I sort of hanker to keep on to the river, just to see what she's like."

"Let's go," amiably suggested the Garretson lad. "There's more'n a dozen sandwiches rolled up in my slicker. We'll have a snack and water up and then roll home."

Bowman was not of a forgiving nature, and the bright vision of Nan Overton was disquieting. He had discovered that jealousy stingeth like an adder. But to display a surly enmity toward "Len" Garretson would be to confess himself a poor loser. There was something rather fine in the conqueror's assumption that bygones were bygones. And his refusal to publish the fact that he had whipped "Bo" McMurray had inspired a sense of gratitude. Therefore the only thing to say was:

"I'll have to go you, Len. It's the Rio Grande or bust. I—I never had a chance to thank you for not telling Miss Overton an' so forth. You understand."

"I wasn't raised to blow my own horn, Bo. My dad used to discourage it with a quirt."

Feeling awkward and tongue-tied, Bowman was glad to have the conversation made less personal, and they confined it to cattle and feed and markets and the gossip of the ranches. Neither lad was in a garrulous mood, and there were long intervals of silence while they gazed in front of them for a glimpse of the Rio Grande and the bare hills of the Mexican frontier. At length they descried a wide expanse of brown, turbid river swollen by recent rains and surging far out beyond its gullied, crumbling banks. They rode cautiously along the edge to a clump of cottonwood which offered a welcome shade from the midday sun. The cow-ponies were left to graze while the young explorers munched sandwiches and discussed the Mexican problem.

Then they yawned and almost fell asleep until Bowman was seized by a most unlucky inspiration.

"I'll bet I could swim across and back!" he exclaimed.

"You're crazy," scoffed Garretson who was never impulsive. "Look at the driftwood and stuff. One of those logs bang you in the head and it's good-night. Besides, you oughtn't to swim after a hearty meal."

"Six sandwiches a hearty meal! You make me laugh. On the level, that would be an easy swim for me, Len. I've a good mind to do that little stunt."

"Bet you won't—bet you five dollars," was the fateful challenge.

It clinched the matter. The McMurray never took a dare. His escutcheon was free from that bar sinister. This was a foolish proceeding, as an inner voice whispered, but the motive will be apparent. The presence of "Len" Garretson spurred him to undertake the hazardous deed, to redeem himself and to mend his broken reputation. It was with this in mind that he exclaimed:

"I stump you to follow me! We'll make a race of it."

"Me? I never swum a stroke in my life," confessed the other, without a blush. "You're the web-footed wonder. Now go to it. What kind of a message shall I send to your folks? Died o' damfoolitis, I reckon."

This was so close to an insult that Bowman cast a black look at him and began to hurl himself out of his boots and clothing. "Len" scrambled down among the upheaved roots of the cottonwood trees and selected a seat in the front row. Tied to a stump by a bit of rope he discovered a dilapidated skiff half filled with water and one oar floating in it.

"Look here, Bo," he yelled. "If this boat was any good I could trail along behind you. But she's shy an oar and looks rotten as punk. I hate to let you go alone. The bet's off. Forget it."

"The bet goes," ripped out Bowman, inspecting the skiff. "You stay out of that old coffin, Len. It'll drown you as sure as guns."

Gingerly the rash swimmer stepped down into

the sullen, dirty water. The opposite bank seemed appallingly distant, the current stronger than he had conjectured, the drifting débris more menacing. For the first time in his life, he was in the cold clutch of fear. It constricted his throat and his heart pounded against his ribs. There was no thought of surrender. A fool had to pay the price of his folly. There was also a strange sense of foreboding. It was something more than merely being frightened. If this had been in the Ireland of his ancestors, he might have listened to hear the cry of the banshee.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEXAS NAVY COMES A-SHOOTIN'

THE reckless McMurray was no tyro at this stunt of swimming Texas rivers. He had taken to the water almost as soon as he could toddle, as eager as a young otter. And now he had the muscle, wind, and endurance to make this tussle with the Rio Grande less perilous than it appeared to the dubious "Len" Garretson, who, for once, was strung up to a pitch of nervous tension. He was shrewd enough to understand his companion's braggart impulse and made a last effort to divert him from it.

"Listen, Bo! You want to show me—I get that, all right. I'll admit that your gizzard is plumb full of sand an' you've scared me stiff. Won't that hold you? Let's forget that mix-up we had. I had an ace in the hole that night, with the science the light-weight pug had showed me all summer. Here's the idea! I'll wrastle you for five dollars. There's where we go to it with an even break."

"Yes, you will," growled the naked Bowman as he waded out. "An' you'll let me throw you, just to save my self-respect. That's the kind of a fightin' fool *you* are, Len. I've made up my mind to wrastle with this old river. *She* won't lay down to me."

The Garretson kid nodded gravely. He knew when to quit. Bowman could not be himself without a touch of emotional climax and he turned to say, in farewell:

"If anything goes wrong, understand, will you please let certain folks know I thought kindly of 'em?"

"I sure will, old scout. I'll tell Nan Overton you did it all for her."

Bowman splashed into the muddy flow and struck out with a long, easy side-stroke. His black head bobbed to the rhythmic swing of the powerful shoulders and a rippling furrow widened in his wake. For a little distance the eddy which swung under the bank held him from drifting rapidly downstream, but as he moved farther out the send of the current caught him and his course veered. He was too canny to fight the river, and so contented himself with heading straight across. A wide bend of the Mexican shore held out the hope of another favoring eddy or a stretch of slack water as soon as he could conquer the sullen might of the deeper channel.

The floating logs and broken limbs bothered him, but most of the time he swam on his left side so that he could gaze upstream and dodge or duck under. Occasionally a heavy fragment, water-soaked and almost submerged, came surging at him as though ambushed with deadly intent, but he managed to avoid striking his head, which was what he dreaded. "Len" Garretson fol-

lowed down along the bank, swearing peevishly, hurling at the swimmer all sorts of insulting, affectionate epithets.

"Look yonder at him—tearin' through it like an old steamboat! You're more'n halfway over, Bo, you punkin-headed lunatic! I wish I'd licked you again, knocked you cold! Holy blazes, you near got snagged that time! Steady, boy, watch 'em!"

After what seemed like several years of mental suffering, he saw the indomitable Bowman McMurray swim more athwart the current, and it was apparent that he had advanced into easier water. The crisis was past. He would soon be crawling out on the Mexican shore and resting himself for the return journey. There were no signs of exhaustion as the shining, black head forged steadily onward in the more sluggish area behind the river's bend. With a sigh of relief that was like a wordless prayer, Garretson saw him find the bottom, heave his back out, and flounder through the ooze to a bit of brown beach under the lee of a hill.

There he sat hunched up, a white blotch, and presently found strength to fling up his arms in salutation. "Len" sat down in the grass because he was also worn out, and made a cigarette. He was not so seriously worried about the homeward voyage of the McMurray. If you did a thing once, you could do it again. And the web-footed kid had surely bluffed the old Rio Grande.

Young Garretson stared across the river and jumped to his feet. His attention had shifted to the wide Mexican plateau which unrolled beyond the low hills. It was a treeless expanse of grazing land which had been swept bare of sheep and cattle by the raiding parties of Federalists and Revolutionists in one foray after another. This was in the days when Villa was rampant, before he quit raising Cain and turned to raising crops more pastoral.

"Len" Garretson's keen vision was held by a number of moving dots which appeared on the plateau. Their motion was too rapid for browsing live-stock and they grew larger. He wished he had not left the glasses at the cottonwood clump. He thought of running to get them, but the scattered, bobbing dots held him fascinated. They could be nothing else than mounted men. This was a swift conclusion and the only plausible one. They were riding at a gallop, straight toward the bend of the Rio Grande. Soon the tiny figures were thrown against a hard, blue sky. The tall, huge sombreros conveyed a grotesque impression. It was like watching a dance of candlesticks. To the Garretson lad, raised on the Texas border, one did not have to explain in detail such a phenomenon as this. There was a hostile glint in those sombre, steadfast eyes of his as he muttered:

"A rebel patrol, as sure as shootin'! There was some talk that they were circlin' back toward the river, but nobody paid much attention to it."

Whatever they were, the boy distrusted them on general principles. Mexicans were bad medicine, as soon as they found guns and horses. And there was poor Bowman McMurray, marooned on the wrong side of the Rio Grande, without a stitch of clothes! The prudent thing for him to do was to stay where he was, hidden under the steep wall of the crumbling bank until the Mexican troopers rode past along the crest of the hill. He was safe against discovery.

"Len" yelled himself hoarse, but the wind blew against him and the warning failed to carry over to Bowman, who was now on his feet and stretching himself and rubbing his legs. Frantically "Len" waved his arms and flourished his hat, trying to make the swimmer comprehend that he was to hug the shore a while longer. Bowman read the signals as encouraging him for the return voyage and he danced a few steps to show that he was sound of wind and limb.

The Mexican patrol slowed its rapid gait to let the horses walk up the gradual incline to the riverbank. Soon they swung to skirt the Rio Grande. Just at this most unlucky moment, Bowman McMurray plunged from his bit of shelving beach, floundered through the mud, and splashed out into the deeper water. He began to swim, but even then he was unobserved by the ragged, slouchy horsemen who had passed a little way below him. "Len" Garretson lay flat in the grass, as still as a graven image. It looked as though he had been

borrowing a heap of trouble. Five minutes more and those Mexican outlaws would be well on their way. The chances were that they wouldn't think of looking behind them to scan the river. If they did happen to spy the helpless swimmer and took him to be a gringo, well, their sense of humor was most infernally peculiar.

"Len" had forgotten the two ponies which had been left to graze with trailing reins. The cottonwood clump had screened them from the sight of the Mexican troopers, but now the two animals moved out into the open. They were perceived by one of the mounted rebels who had dropped behind the others. He spurred his jaded horse and shouted to the leader. The squad halted and wheeled to reconnoitre. It was their business to observe and to report. Those two ponies on the Texas side were saddled. They might belong to American cavalry scouts or to a detail of Rangers. It was something to investigate.

While they jabbered and gesticulated, one of them happened to descry the swimmer in midstream. Ah, ha, here was something! This one in the water was returning to the American side! He had been guilty of an invasion of Mexico. *Caramba*, they would teach him to defy the sovereign republic, to spit on the flag of a proud and jealous people! A Yankee soldier, no doubt, a cursed spy, caught in the act!

This was the pretext, as eloquently declaimed by the unwashed, pock-marked lieutenant with

ten pounds of gold braid on his hat. The truth was that here was the chance for some fine sport, more enjoyable than a cock-fight. To shoot at a swimming target like this was a novelty. They jerked up the carbines and rifles, a dozen of them, and laughed as they fingered the cartridge clips. The lieutenant was granted the courtesy of the first shot. He cuddled the butt against his shoulder, set the sights with the air of a dandy marksman, and aimed at the sleek, round head of the swimmer. The bullet flew so wild that Bowman failed to notice the splash, but he faintly heard the report and rubbed the water from his eyes to catch a glimpse of the Texas shore where he fancied "Len" might be signaling him.

But the unterrified Garretson kid was seen to be running for dear life, through the grass to the cottonwood trees to get his hands on his own rifle. Bowman observed that he was in a great hurry about something and it looked like trouble. Just then the delighted Mexicans squibbed off a scattering volley. The bullets kicked up the water like a school of fish and the reports sounded like Fourth of July fire-crackers. Treading water, the puzzled swimmer shoved himself around to stare at the Mexican shore. The mounted men had raised their weapons for another round of target practice. Bowman dived like a flash. He stayed under, swimming desperately, until his tortured lungs forced him to the surface.

This gave an added zest to the sportsmen's

pastime. They were so excited and mirthful that the guns wobbled. It was like baiting a bull in the ring. They would hold their fire until the target came up for breath. If they failed to hit him, he would drown after a while. By the twenty-four feet of the Twelve Apostles, this mad Yankee could swim like a fish! There he was, up again, and not a bullet touched him, and now he had vanished, quick as lightning! Mother of God, would he never appear again? Was the game ended so soon? He must have been hit that last time. It was the lieutenant's rifle, beyond doubt! There was a man who could shoot like the devil!

The merry marksmen had been so fascinated by the antics of their aquatic target that they failed to notice the flight of the other lad along the Texas shore of the Rio Grande. "Len" Garretson's first impulse was to take cover with the rifle and open on the enemy at eight hundred yards. He had a notion that he could empty a saddle or two and scatter the rest of the dirty scoundrels. But as he dashed in among the cottonwoods and snatched up his gun, a swift glance over his shoulder told him that Bowman McMurray needed more help than this.

The pitiful fugitive of a swimmer was fast tiring from his tremendous efforts to escape the bullets that sprayed and spattered all about him. "Len" saw him come to the surface, plough along hand over hand, and reach out to grasp a log which

floated past. It was a feeble, despairing effort. He had been under water so much that he was, no doubt, fairly gasping for air. A bit of sodden bark flew from the log as a whining bullet hit it and Bowman let go and dived once more. It had become the instinctive, hopeless struggle for survival of a cornered animal.

"Here's where the Navy gets action and she comes a-shootin'," cried the Garretson kid as he scrambled down to the rotten skiff and slithered the mooring-rope with his knife. In he plopped, an arm through the rifle sling, and shoved off with the one oar. The water in the leaky little tub was almost up to the gunwales, but it floated precariously while "Len" baled with his Stetson and let the current carry him downstream. It occurred to him to wish that he had learned to swim. Afraid to move lest he capsize the boat or push the bottom out of it, he perceived that he would have to use the oar in order to steer farther out. At this rate, he would drift clean by Bowman without a chance to rescue him. Very carefully he paddled, poised with a native ease and dexterity, and the sluggish skiff responded.

The Mexican picnic party beheld him as a new diversion. This was a circus of two rings! Popping at the skiff was more certain of results. For the moment they forgot the exhausted swimmer and endeavored to bag his comrade. This respite enabled Bowman to remain on the surface and struggle toward the skiff. The spark of hope,

which had been so nearly snuffed out, rekindled his courage. He felt strong enough to kick a little longer.

If there was any sympathy to spare, "Len" Garretson was the lad who needed it, but he was entirely too busy to feel sorry for himself. At least three bullets had perforated the skiff and this did not help its buoyancy. The Texas navy was in a bad way. "Len" had ceased baling, however, because of other pressing occupations. He plied the oar and grimly endured being shot at until satisfied that he was drifting down to intercept Bowman. This was the vital factor of the equation.

Then the hardy navigator picked up his rifle and very deliberately calculated the distance and held up a wet finger to gauge the breeze. He was very angry at being bushwhacked by these murderous greasers and he hoped their souls would sizzle in hell for a million years, but it was foolish to let them get your goat. The Garretsons were noted for a certain placidity of temperament when in a tight pinch. "Len" chose the Mexican lieutenant for his, because of the glint of gold on his hat. He was about to pull trigger when a bullet thudded through the side of the skiff and grazed the calf of his leg. It was like the touch of a hot iron and he almost lost his temper.

"Just for that, I'll make *you* kiss yourself goodbye," said the Garretson kid as he lined his sights on the lieutenant, a few inches below the expensive

sombrero. The shot was not wasted. It was odd to see the bulky lieutenant clap his hand to his breast with a theatrical gesture, sway in the saddle, and slide to the ground like a sack of meal. The sombrero bounced from his head and rolled like a hoop, over the edge of the cut-bank and down to the river's edge, where it gleamed in memoriam.

The Mexican laughter ceased. They flew off their horses and burrowed in the grass. Young Garretson got one as he lit from the saddle and stumbled over his spurs. He staggered and fell, then crawled on hands and knees toward the shelter of a mesquite bush. The boy was shooting better than he knew, but now the dice were loaded against him. He was unable to see the enemy excepting as one of them raised his head or the sun winked on a gun-barrel. They were balefully determined to kill him. It had ceased to be a jovial pastime.

"I can disturb 'em some, at that," murmured "Len." "If I can only hook onto Bo before those bad hombres get my number!"

He fired a couple of snap-shots which caused a slight lull in the fusillade and caught up the paddle. Bowman was churning the water no more than a dozen feet away. His face was tragically pale and drawn, but he grinned and threw up a hand. "Len" drove the skiff with all his strength, oblivious of the embattled Mexicans. They had ceased to interest him. Bowman ducked under as a bullet combed his hair and reappeared to

clutch the gunwale of the skiff. "Len" grasped his arm and was for trying to haul him inboard, but the fugitive gurgled:

"Quit that! Y-you'll upset the b-boat! Slide over the s-side an' hang on, Len, quick! G-get me?"

"I sure do, you old Siwash. I couldn't seem to figure what card to play next."

The skiff floated almost submerged, but had buoyancy enough to support the two lads with little exertion as they hung to it with only their faces out of water. Carefully Bowman edged himself around the stern until they were both on the same side. Then they kicked their feet until the derelict boat swung away from the Mexican side and was so turned that it concealed the castaways from the view of the snipers in the grass. Paddling in this fashion, it was found possible to guide the skiff very slowly out of the current and into the friendly eddy.

"Can you fetch it, Bo?" anxiously asked the Garretson boy. "You must be all in. If we hook our belts together it'll help hold you up."

"An' drown me if you let go," snorted Bowman. "Much obliged, Len, but I've got my second wind. This is easy. For Heaven's sake, don't you slip off and drown yourself."

"That's where a cat has good sense," complained "Len." "She just naturally abominates water."

"Drop your long legs," commanded Bowman. "I shouldn't wonder if you could touch bottom."

"Hooray, that feels like good old Texas! Look here, when we prance up the bank, those greasers will be liable to fan us, Bo. Let me go first with the rifle and keep 'em kind of subdued till we can work around to our clothes."

The competent Garretson streaked out of the Rio Grande, darted for a stump, and emptied the magazine at the republic of Mexico. This strategy enabled Bowman to totter to dry land and roll into the grass. The disgruntled Mexican soldiery fired with a fretful infrequency. It was to be inferred that the game had lost its charm. Their desire was to lay hands on their horses and call it the end of a painfully imperfect day. One of them stood up and waved a dingy kerchief. It betokened a profound respect for the rifle of the Garretson kid who commented, in even tones:

"They can go, Bo. The battle is over. What's the use? Maybe I could get another one on the jump-off, but we don't want to be pestered. It's a mystery to me why a greaser can't learn to hold a gun straight."

"Wave your hat and say adios," advised Bowman. "I want my clothes."

The squad of Mexican troopers stalked sadly to their patient horses and lashed across the saddles the bodies of the frolicsome lieutenant and the misguided private. Then they rode down the shore of the Rio Grande until the bobbing sombreros vanished. "Len" Garretson walked to the cottonwood clump and returned with the garments

and the ponies. The hot sun dried him out and he flung himself in the grass beside Bowman who was too weary to talk. They were drugged with fatigue. Sleep was the blessed remedy. And so they sprawled and had troubled dreams and nervous twitches until the cool of the afternoon. Then they unkinked their aching muscles and pensively surveyed the turbid Rio Grande and the bare, peaceful landscape of Mexico. Close to the water's edge the hat of the lieutenant gleamed like a fallen nugget.

"I wouldn't go after it if it was worth a million dollars," fervently declared Bowman McMurray. "Well, I s'pose you know you saved my life."

"Don't talk moving-picture stuff," sternly answered the hero, embarrassed for once.

Bowman blushed. "Len" had prodded one of his failings. The tide of sentimental emotion was not to be so easily curbed, however, and the grateful McMurray went on to say:

"There can't be any more hard feelings between us, after this. It's all wiped out, as far as I'm concerned. Any time I can do you a favor, Len, old man, you just make the high sign."

"Pshaw, you don't have to tell me, Bo. Now if you want to please me, quit making any more fuss about my hoppin' out after those Mexicans. And we'd better forget it, anyhow. I don't want to figure in any international relations and outrages."

"You and I will always be intimate friends,"

solemnly persisted Bowman, "prob'ly till death do us part. It's a hunch."

He held up two fingers, close together, as a symbol and a ceremony.

"*Just like this, Len.*"

The impassive Garretson kid disclosed his feelings by smiling with sincere affection as he held up two fingers, close together, and echoed:

"*Just like this, Bo.*"

They caught their ponies and cinched the slackened girths. As they jogged homeward, Bowman's active imagination was picturing a future in which he and his intimate friend should continue this fast alliance. Even though there was a woman in the case, she must not be allowed to come between them. Let the best man win! No, that didn't sound right. It was his duty to make the great sacrifice and repay "Len" Garretson for saving his life. He would take his broken heart to their wedding and show 'em how a college football player could stand the gaff. Maybe they would name one of their blond-headed children after the famous quarter-back, Bowman McMurray.

These were such sad and noble and beautiful thoughts that he had nothing to say during the first mile of the long ride home to the ranch. Then he burst out:

"Say, Len, how old are you? Where do you go to school?"

"'Most seventeen. Parryville High—nearest town to our place. Finish in two more years."

"Is it any good? How about the football team? It must be poor. I never heard of it."

"It's a punk little school, Bo. There's only five boys in my class. Parryville don't make much of a dent, anyhow. She's a busted boom. Dad talks of packin' me off somewhere else for next year."

"Sure he does!" cried the eager Bowman. "Fort Hawley High School. It's th' darndest coinc'dence I ever heard of! We'll put the punch into that old football team an' then we'll go to college together. Hold on, I forgot a certain complication. Never mind, they're expectin' to send her off to boarding-school in St. Louis next September."

"It listens all right to me," agreed Garretson, ignoring the feminine factor. "But what's this college stuff? You spring it kind of sudden."

"Didn't I tell you? A real, gilt-edge education is a mighty valuable asset, Len. It knocks the rough corners off you. An' it learns you to take life to pieces an' see what makes it tick. Besides, there's the advantages of being on a regular college football team an' everything."

"What's the matter with Texas?" drawled young Garretson. "It's all cluttered up with colleges. You ought to get operated on for this football bug. Ticks? I reckon it is. You talk like a sheepman."

"Wait till Fayette Caldwell gets hold of you," declaimed Bowman. "You'll be ashamed of your

fool ignorance. *He* is why I'm bound to Kentucky for my college c'reer. Any place that can turn out a man like him has got the goods."

"What do you call this peerless institution, Bo?" queried Leonard, who was more interested than he betrayed.

"Little old Centre College in the Blue-Grass country," proudly answered the boy, as though he already held a diploma and two or three degrees. "Not so mighty big, but she's been at it a hundred years an' shows *class*. You know what that means in a horse, Len. It's the same with a college. Fayette Caldwell is a sample. That's all I've got to say."

"Orate some more," urged "Len," in livelier tones. "Who was this Caldwell sired by and how many blue ribbons has he won?"

"Don't kid me," pleaded Bowman. "I know it all by heart. An' I bet *you'll* sit up. What did President Wilson say? You'll listen to him, won't you? '*There is a small college in Kentucky that in its years of existence has turned out more men that have attained prominence than has Princeton in more than twice that length of time.*' You know who Princeton is, Len. She licked Harvard an' tied Yale last season."

"Name some of these prominent products, Bo. I want to feel sure of my company."

"Ten Governors, two Vice-Presidents, eight Senators, one Supreme Court guy, fifty-two judges, twenty-eight Congressmen, twenty-six college pres-

idents, sixty college professors, an' so forth an' so on. I reckon that ought to hold you."

"It sure do. Which one do you aim to be? I'll match you. I lean toward bein' a Vice-President. All you do is draw your breath an' your pay."

"On the level, Len, you're int'rested, aren't you?"

"I near fell off my pony, Bo, when you fired that last load. This college idea wouldn't make dad buck an' snort like old Tom Jaycox, but he feels that when he's shoved me through high school, that lets him out."

"What do you care? Nobody has to grub-stake us. We'll rustle an education, Len."

"You'll have to show me, but I'll try anything once. If we round up at school in Fort Hawley next winter, we can figure this thing out on a war basis."

CHAPTER V

THE LONG TRAIL TO CENTRE COLLEGE

It was at the urgent solicitation of Bowman McMurray, captain elect, that Fayette Caldwell consented to serve as advisory coach of the high-school eleven when the playing season opened in September. He was a zealous young attorney-at-law, but Sallie told him it would do him a heap of good to be dragged out of his office in the afternoon, even if he did miss a client, and, anyhow, money was the least of her worries. Her sweetheart was growing round-shouldered, she declared, and his color was poor, and she had actually seen him try to kick the cat, which was a sure sign of nerves. First thing you knew, he would be spanking the precious "Scooch" with a hair-brush and this would naturally be grounds for divorce.

No recreation could have been more congenial than to hammer into these ramping, eager lads not only the tactics, but also the spirit and the ethics of the game. Of course they should have been more ambitious to shine in the classroom than on the football field, but healthy youth is not built that way and this was an opportunity for leadership. The school-teacher was an unavoidable affliction. The coach could compel obedience, instant and willing. His word was the law

and the gospel. Caldwell understood this and felt the responsibility of it. After a fortnight of practice, he was at the field for a little while, almost every afternoon. The men of Fort Hawley who were so busy making money would have laughed at the queer notion that his job was bigger than any of theirs.

He soon perceived that the eleven would be built around "Bo" McMurray and "Len" Garretson. The limber young cow-puncher was a kid in years only. Shrewd, cool, and wary, he possessed the fighting spirit, and football appealed to him as a man's-sized proposition. He was a born full-back, punting the ball as easily as he handled a rifle, learning to tackle with the ferocity of a steel-trap, ready to hurl himself into the thick of a rush-line and twist through an opening.

The chunky McMurray had found his peculiar niche at quarter-back. He was the strategist, gifted with the football sense, driving his team with fiery ardor and infusing his own determination to do or die in the last ditch.

As the season advanced and weeded out the unfit, Fayette Caldwell discovered one more rough diamond. It was extraordinary that three such youngsters should have come into his hands. This player was the centre-rush, John Mercer, who was much better known as "Red." He was a brindle-topped, freckled lad, who could be easier coaxed than driven. In the school-room he wore spectacles and took prizes in mathematics. His friends stated

that algebra and geometry lay down and yelled for help when they saw him coming. By way of mental diversion he played chess. His father was a Presbyterian minister of the old-fashioned scholarly type who read Greek and Hebrew. The son was permitted to play football only so long as he continued to lead his class on the basis of marks.

"Red" Mercer was not built like an athlete. In fact, he was scrawny. His growth had not caught up with the size of his feet and he was liable to stumble over them. He walked with his chin down, his big hands clasped behind him, precisely as his father was wont to pace the study floor when preparing the next Sunday morning's sermon. When away from the football field, he was lamentably absent-minded. The girls called him a funny old high-brow and treated him cruelly. This was partly because of a slow and careful habit of speech which had a bookish flavor. Sometimes he used the English language instead of the slovenly jargon of slang which is the fashion in high schools and colleges.

Football attracted him as a series of rapidly shifting problems to be solved by initiative and intelligence. He studied the books written by the masters of the game and searched for flaws in their diagrams. He invented combinations and formations of his own, for attack and defense, and anxiously submitted them to Fayette Caldwell's scrutiny. To be consistent, he resolved to demonstrate that the brains of a centre-rush were more essential than his

muscle and beef. There was much more to it, in his opinion, than passing the ball back and standing as an obstruction to be tipped over. Bowman McMurray's verdict was, as confided to "Len" Garretson:

"Red is a queer guy in some ways, understand,—such as liking to study an' so forth. But as long as it don't interfere with his football, I can't call him down for that. A couple o' years from now, with twenty or thirty pounds more heft—oh, boy! He'll be there!"

"Red's folks are vegenarians, Bo. They live on squirrel food an' cabbages. He don't get enough to eat. That's what keeps him skinny."

"Yes, and don't I feed him a beefsteak twice a week at Pedro's short order café? It keeps me poor, Len. But I like that boy, person'lly. There ain't a crooked freckle on him."

"He qualifies for advanced registry in my herd-book," agreed the critical Garretson, whose standards of manhood were severe. "What about taking him along to Kentucky with us? Don't we need him to save us from flunkin' our exams?"

"I thought of that, Len. Besides, he's dead sure to be a regular college football player. Fayette Caldwell says he has the stuff!"

"Did he, Bo? Then Red is due to hitch up with this combination. Have you sprung it on him?"

"In a ten'tive way. That's one of Red's fancy words. Let's see how he finishes the season."

"He won't crack," declared "Len." "There's a

red-headed foreman out at our ranch that looks just like him. They don't know how to quit. Dad says it's the rust from so much extra iron in their blood that turns their hair that color. Does Red Mercer want to go to college?"

"Can a duck swim? His father has him pointed for the ministry, but Red says science an' religion don't seem gaited quite right for a double hitch an' he is firmly wedded to science."

"He's married young," said "Len." "Where does he want to go to college?"

"Oh, he likes what he's heard of Centre College. Traditions of culture, scholarship, an' so forth mean more than athaletic not'riety, Red tells me. I told *him* to wait till we-all lit on th' little old Kentucky campus. We aim to make her notorious."

"Has he asked his father, Bo?"

"Ten'tively. The old man approves. Centre College had the Presbyterian brand one time, tho' they've sort of lived it down. Of course, the ministry don't get enough pay to send Red through college, even if they are vegenarians. But Red can rustle, just like us."

"It would be great," exclaimed Garretson, and he held up *three* fingers, close together. "*Just like this.*"

Bowman held up three fingers, close together, and feelingly echoed:

"*Just like this*, Len. He's elected. What a coinc'dence, that we've found another one."

This football season was, after all, only an episode

in the career of Bowman McMurray, and you may be as much inclined to get on with his story as I am. The Fort Hawley eleven was undefeated and wound up the schedule by administering a terrific drubbing to the visitors from Waco. Alas, Nan Overton was absent in boarding-school and so was denied the pleasure of seeing the outcast Cap'n Bowman McMurray come into his own. Perhaps she still disliked football, but she would have shouted wildly and waved the school colors when the helmeted "Bo" sped untouched for eighty yards and a touchdown while the lithe "Len" Garretson galloped beside him for a brilliant interference. And to see "Red" Mercer surging into every play, before it happened, was like watching a red-headed comet.

After this climax there came an emotional slump which attracted the attention of Fayette Caldwell. His three young heroes played basket-ball through the winter and baseball in the spring, but their interest was perceptibly listless. Caldwell soon diagnosed the situation. There was the rest of this year to be lived through and then another one before they could hope to shake the dust of Fort Hawley and reach the goal of college. Youth has not learned to wait with patience. Fayette Caldwell had begun with them too soon. The road stretched too far ahead. These were lads already more mature in some respects than the average college freshman, and yet it seemed to them as though they must eternally wear the shackles of

high-school kids. Caldwell gave it much thought before submitting his startling scheme to Sallie.

"Honey, I started something and I can't let go. I've a good mind to send the Big Three along to Kentucky next year."

"Where to? What's the answer?" was her astonished comment. "To exhibit them? You don't sound right in your head."

"Let them go to school in Somersworth and get ready for college," he began to explain. "They won't feel so sort of hopeless and far away. They are beginning to skid, Sallie, and I can't blame them. Somersworth is only thirty miles from Danville and Centre College. The school has prepared a good many boys. It is in touch with the campus and I know all the folks. It will seem like really getting ahead."

"But what about money, Fayette? Len Garretson has an allowance, but poor Bowman and Red Mercer can't possibly afford it."

"They expect to go to college without any visible means of support. That seems to be the least of their worries. It's an independent, resourceful outfit if ever there was one. Why not let them get broken into it for a year? There's no harm in trying. It's not like going to an expensive prep school."

"Somersworth has the best high-school football team in the Blue Grass," demurely smiled Sallie. "You used to brag about it."

"That was when I played full-back," he modestly

acknowledged. "Well, what else can I do about these three boys I've gone and adopted?"

"Scooch will holler terribly if you take his Bowman away," sighed Sallie, "and I don't know what I shall do, but a woman always gets the worst of it. Is it your intention to personally-conduct this expedition to your old Kentucky home?"

"Can't afford it. And it's much better to let them shift for themselves. I come trailing into Somersworth with them and every old family in town will consider it a sacred duty to take care of Fayette Caldwell's boys."

"You better mention it to their parents, seems to me, Fayette. A lawyer ought to know that it's unconstitutional, or something like that, to kidnap three trusting and innocent little lads."

"Aren't they, though? I can put it across with Tom McMurray, but when it comes to the Reverend John Calvin Mercer and the destiny of Red, I foresee an argument."

Sallie foresaw a battle and Fayette badly routed, but she sensibly refrained from saying so. It was much wiser to let her impulsive young husband find things out for himself. He was not one to let the grass grow under his feet, and on the very next day he called at the Presbyterian manse. The clergyman was a worn, fragile-looking man at best, and just now he was passing through a particularly trying ordeal of trying to make both ends meet. His prosperous parishioners believed that the church ought to be supported, it would be a heathenish

community otherwise, but they found it much easier to buy new automobiles than to increase their subscriptions. Ministers should be contented with higher rewards than money.

"I have felt grateful for your interest in my son, Mr. Caldwell," said Dr. Mercer, as they sat down together. "He was too absorbed in football, perhaps, but the physical improvement has been marked. Strangely enough, he has stood better in his studies then than since. I am quite perplexed."

"Restless, sir. I've noticed it, too. I have something to suggest for it."

"Ah, here he comes now," exclaimed the parent as John Calvin Mercer, Junior, yanked open the front door and stumbled over the sill. Under his arm was a load of books which he dropped with a racket that made his father wince. His sleeves were too short for his bony wrists and one cuff was plentifully splotched with ink. Surmising that something was in the wind, he grinned at Fayette Caldwell and flopped upon the sofa. It was a significant grin, as between two men who understood each other perfectly. Alas, that the anxious, devoted father should have been unable to inspire such an intimacy as this.

Caldwell outlined his plan, as persuasively as possible, and the freckled, intelligent features of John Calvin, Junior, beamed approval. He caught the salient points at once, kindly explaining to his father:

"It puts you in touch with the college you are

going to. You feel you belong to it before you get there. Stimulus and atmosphere are bully good bets. And you won't have to feed and take care of me."

"Who will?" was the dazed interrogation of Dr. Mercer.

"Leave that to us. Of course I haven't had as much experience as Bo McMurray and Len Garretson, father, but if we stick together there will absolutely be no such word as fail. As Bo says, we'll have the world by the tail."

The minister turned to Caldwell to say, in a troubled voice:

"Are these two young men—one can scarcely call them boys—fit companions for my son? Do you advise me to let him go with them on this quixotic adventure, away from the influences of a godly home?"

"I'd trust *my* boy with them, if Scooch was old enough to go away to school," was the quick assurance. "They have not had your son's advantages, Dr. Mercer, but they are very eager to improve themselves. And they are loyal and honest and brave. Those things score a hundred per cent with me."

"It's my great and only chance to go to college," almost tearfully implored "Red." "And you know what President Wilson said about old Centre. '*There is a small college in Kentucky that in its years of existence has turned out more men that have attained —*'"

The minister threw up his hands and fairly shouted:

"Stop it! You will drive me distracted. You have chanted that quotation at meals. You have spouted it, with gestures to imaginary audiences in the side yard, and you have mumbled it in your sleep."

"It's true, isn't it, father?" sulkily replied John Calvin, Junior.

Caldwell diplomatically interposed to say:

"If you will be so good as to talk it over with your wife, Dr. Mercer, and assure her that I have the boy's future very much at heart—that I am not thinking entirely in terms of a football coach—"

"You are considered to be one of Fort Hawley's finest young men," was the handsome compliment, "and your opinion will carry much weight with me. You have quite taken my breath away, I must confess. And I cannot imagine letting my son go wandering off in this hazardous manner—"

"It develops a boy's self-reliance, father, to get out and rustle early instead of growing up fossilized," proclaimed John Calvin, Junior, to whom Bowman and Leonard Garretson had persistently preached the doctrine that life was a gamble.

The minister nodded assent to this dictum. Perhaps he felt a twinge of regret that his own pathway had been so sheltered and uneventful. He ventured to suggest a possible compromise.

"Why not let McMurray and Garretson go on ahead and spy out the land, Mr. Caldwell? If it is pos-

sible to earn enough money in Somersworth, outside of school hours, which seems extremely dubious, and if good reports are received of their progress and behavior—"

"And break up the combination?" mourned "Red."

"Don't interrupt, my son. In short, let them prove the case, and I may feel inclined to let John join them later, for part of the year before entering college—"

"I am glad to find you persuaded halfway, sir," said Caldwell.

Several days later Bowman McMurray and young Garretson were walking down street arm-in-arm, both talking at once and each beseeching the other to have some sense, for Heaven's sake, and listen to a fellow. From the tangled dialogue it was possible to wrest such bits as this:

"Red's father has surrendered, ten'tively! If we make good he joins us. What was it your dad wrote, Len?"

"Oh, he said he had contracted to see me through school an' if I was hell-bent on Kentucky, it wasn't worth raisin' a rumpus about. About college, he didn't know,—better play one card at a time. How much money will you have, Bo?"

"What I earn before then. That's plenty. No, I won't let you loan me a darn cent. I'll get some kind of a business proposition started in little old Somersworth, all right, and be ready to take Red Mercer into pardnership when he turns up. While

he's terribly brainy, he is liable to be impracterble in spots. Ministers' sons are raised that way, anyhow. I b'lieve the Lord will provide, but you *gotta* give Him good interference."

"When do you reckon we can drift, Bo?"

"Fayette Caldwell says next September. He wrote the Somersworth school about us. Er--say, Len, come to think of it, there's one or two little matters I'd like to speak to you about. You don't happen to know when boarding-schools in St. Louis, for instance, shut up for the Christmas vacation?"

"Miss Nancy Overton came home yesterday," coldly answered the Garretson kid. His sallow cheek flushed a little. He glanced at his comrade with that vigilant look which was so much older than his years.

The amiable chatter slackened and died. Bowman sadly reflected that all his self-sacrifice had been in vain. He had decided to let 'em marry each other and now, at the mere mention of the woman's name, "Len" Garretson seemed like he was ready to shoot to kill. However, you could forgive 'most anything in a man who had stood off a whole drove of Mexicans and saved your life.

After supper Bowman put on the black suit whose seams had been let out before he burst them, and told his mother that he was going to make a little call on a certain person. Mrs. McMurray was clinging to him these days, as though every time she saw him would be the last one. And little was

required to make them both tearful whenever the parting was mentioned, although it was months away. As for the little McMurrays, they trooped at his heels or climbed over him, and it was like picking off burdock burrs to get rid of them.

"'Tis not your manners that worry me, but do remember your temper," warned his mother as she gave a necktie a deft twitch. Thus she had spoken on a previous occasion.

"I'll never come back from the Overtons' with another jaw poked out of plumb, believe me, ma. There's times when once is a heap."

With the maternal injunction in mind, Bowman hastened on his sentimental journey. He was quite prepared to find "Len" Garretson in the Overton parlor. It was, in fact, what he called playing a sure-fire hunch. He therefore registered polite surprise when he encountered the limber young cowpuncher alone at the piano, tickling the keys for a little rag-time while waiting for Miss Overton to descend.

"Why, hullo, Len, old man! Isn't this nice!" cordially exclaimed the McMurray.

"It was nicer two minutes ago, when there weren't so many of us," frankly replied the other suitor. "If you're in a hurry, don't wait."

"Oh, I've got lots of time. Seems funny you didn't mention the idea of coming up here to-night. Th' agreement is not to hold out on each other about anything."

"I didn't hear you pourin' your intentions into my left ear," was the logical retort.

"Did you read in to-day's paper about the big fire in Dallas?" said Bowman, tactfully shifting his ground.

Garretson yawned and looked bored. The McMurray gazed at the nearest window, but it happened to open upon the dusky bit of lawn behind the garage. He absently caressed his jaw and picked up a book to stare at. Then Nancy swept in, indescribably impressive, her golden hair done up like a young lady's, her demeanor conveying just the slightest hauteur. But there was the same frank sweetness in her blue eyes as she surveyed these two manly friends of hers. And there was a ripple of mischief in her smile as she could not help recalling another meeting in this same room.

"I am glad you boys are *so* fond of each other," she told them, after the first formalities. "Len was telling me about it last night. It is perfectly romantic, like David and Goliath—no, I reckon I mean Jonathan, don't I, Bowman?"

"You mean to tell me Len was up here last night?" blurted the aggrieved McMurray, ignoring the historical blunder. "He didn't give you much time to get rested after your long journey, seems to me, Miss Overton. Sounds inconsid'rate!"

"Oh, Len Garretson is always refreshing," cried Nancy, sternly resolved to be neutral, but already slipping a little in spite of herself. They did tease so easily. Bowman had begun to glower. His sad

and noble and beautiful thoughts were dimming. With another effort, however, to rid the situation of any strain, he said:

"Len is a fine young fellow and he can't have too much of a good woman's influence. Say, Nan, we're going to college. Did he tell you about that?"

"Why, no. He hinted at a secret. How in the world can you boys get into college so soon?"

"Well, we are going to stop on the way, just for next year, that's all. But that's a mere detail. It's good old Centre College in Kentucky. Maybe you never heard of it, but President Wilson said—"

"Shut up!" very rudely interrupted the Garretson kid. "If I have to listen to that again, I'll yell for help. Red Mercer said it for you. It's my turn. 'Ten Governors, two Vice-Presidents, eight Senators,' et cetera, and Bowman McMurray."

"I do expect to help the college some," admitted "Bo." "What do you think of us, Nan?"

"I think a lot of you both," was the honest confession, "and I hate to realize we are all grown up and doomed to separation. But such is life, isn't it? So complex and unexpected. I feel *so* much older and more thoughtful since I went to St. Louis to complete my education. It will affect you in the same way, I'm sure. Do you play bridge?"

"Stud-poker," drawled Garretson, "but Bo made me swear off. We can't afford to risk our capital."

Bowman had become lost in thought. He was his own true self again. How contemptible of him

to feel annoyed at "Len." Here was the first trial of their intimate friendship, the chance to show that gratitude and eternal obligation which he had sworn to live up to. Grandly the McMurray rose to his feet and said, with a bow:

"You two may have some things to talk over, Len, old man. I just dropped in to pay my respects, anyhow. Got a lot of work to do to-night."

"But I don't want you to go," protested Nancy, who appeared puzzled and hurt. "We were going to talk over old times."

"Much obliged, Nan. I wish you every happiness, and congratulations. Years ago I said, at the football game where I had to lick three cops and you pinned me up, — I said to myself, '*Yonder girl will make a fine wife for some worthy young fellow.*' I remember th' exact words."

"For goodness' sake, Bowman McMurray! What ails you to-night?" gasped the girl.

"Motion-picture stuff. He eats it up," cynically explained the Garretson kid. "Let him rave."

Bowman overlooked this affront. He proposed to finish in style. As he moved toward the hall, Nancy laid a hand on his sleeve and implored:

"Aren't you coming to say good-bye before you go to Kentucky, Bo?"

"Much obliged, if it's perfectly convenient to all concerned. You look very beautiful to-night, Miss Overton."

Young Garretson lounged in the background, hands in his pockets. Just as the splendid Mc-

Murray was about to pass out into the night, the door-bell rang. He concluded to wait a minute. It was another hunch. Presently a colored servant admitted a rather gawky youth of a freckled complexion who removed his hat to reveal a curly, auburn thatch. Under his arm he carried a little box. At discovering Bowman, he appeared to experience nervous surprise, for he slipped on a rug and dropped the box which flew open and scattered a number of small carved, wooden objects. He let them lie on the floor while he shook hands with Nan and exclaimed:

"I didn't know you expected company, Miss Overton. I can teach you how to play chess some other time."

"I'm perfectly delighted, Mr. Mercer. Bowman is just going, but Len Garretson will enjoy watching us, I'm sure."

The McMurray gazed at the infatuated "Red," and then at the hovering Garretson kid who looked very much as though he regretted leaving his firearms at home. With a grin so wide that it hurt his face, Bowman held up three fingers, close together, and murmured in farewell:

"*Just like this!*"

CHAPTER VI

HOW TO RUSTLE AN EDUCATION

In sending his manly young Texans into the Blue-Grass country for their last year of preparatory schooling, Fayette Caldwell felt confident that it would keep their ardor bright and their purpose resolute. They would be no longer dreaming of something intangible, beyond the horizon. After all, their enthusiasm for football was a means to an end. If Caldwell's motives appeared to be a trifle mixed, the same can be said of most generous impulses.

Early in September Bowman McMurray and the Garretson kid invaded the leisurely old town of Somersworth, like pioneers who follow an unknown trail. It was a region of opulent farms which had been tilled for a hundred years, of tobacco and hemp and corn and fat cattle, where the people were the lords and not the slaves of the soil. Their tall sons went to college and returned to the spacious brick homesteads to be Kentucky farmers and gentlemen. They were an aristocracy, dignified and substantial, which made the noisy pretensions of city-bred folks seem rather shabby. In this fortunate Blue-Grass region there was no desire to blot the smiling landscape with factories and the huddled, polyglot wretchedness of industrial activity.

It was singularly unlike the organized frenzy with which Fort Hawley endeavored to make itself bigger and busier. The first impressions of Somersworth almost dismayed Bowman McMurray. If a stranger hustled around too much, they might throw him in jail for disturbing the peace. "Len" Garretson found it a most congenial atmosphere. It suited his lazy moods to loaf in front of the old courthouse on the main street and watch the wagons come plodding in to market and the sociability of people who found time to halt and greet each other courteously and talk as the spirit moved them.

Bowman was moved to comment:

"They got this country all finished a long time ago, Len. And they don't have to break their backs to keep it going. It makes good old Texas seem kind of scrambled an' nervous. God was mighty good to this piece of Kentucky, but He left Texas to rustle for her own salvation. How about that?"

"What dad ought to do is raise steers in Texas and fatten 'em here—blue-grass pasture up to their knees and it never wears out."

"But that don't pasture and fatten me," sensibly observed McMurray. "Well, we've interviewed the principal of the high school and he looks pretty good. He ought to know more about the prospects of the football team, of course, but I don't think he used to be a player. That's a pretty comfortable room we've hired and it's cheap. I have a small bank-roll, which is comfortin', and now, Len, old

man, I *gotta* get busy and prospect this little old town."

"Count me in," insisted Garretson. "I don't propose to sit and watch you work your fool head off. We're pardners, clean across the board. Don't forget that."

"All right. This afternoon you go do th' social engagements. There's old Colonel Shelby that stopped us on the street yesterday an' wanted to know if we were the boys Fayette Caldwell had sent up from Texas. An' there's Miss Ella Caldwell, the old-maid aunt, to pay our respects to. You just tell 'em all that as soon as I get my business affairs in shape, I'll present my compliments in person, understand?"

"Yours to oblige," easily assented the Garretson kid. "Anything else?"

"Find the captain of the football team, if you can, and tell him we must have an important conference with him right soon. Be sure to ask him how is the material."

Thereupon the industrious McMurray proceeded to investigate the commercial possibilities of Somersworth which was a town of three thousand people and one business street that rambled up and down hill and was lined with small brick and frame stores. The quest proved to be difficult, for such work as Bowman could undertake would have to be done in odd hours, between study and the school session and the daily football practice. He was not at all cast down, however, and implicitly

took it for granted that the star of his destiny still twinkled.

At length he paused in front of a tailor shop, the only one in town, and stared at the sign for some time. Suddenly he seemed to radiate an optimism, confident, untroubled by doubt. He had found the answer. Through the rest of the afternoon he might have been seen to call briefly in one store after another, even to waylay leading citizens in front of the court-house or at the street-corners. The results were jotted down in a little notebook. The hour for supper overtook him, but he delayed to catch a few more victims homeward bound and then hustled to find Garretson at the restaurant. The latter swung himself off the stool at the counter to inquire:

"Did you horn into any trouble? Never saw you late at a meal. I thought maybe you had got down-hearted and started back for Texas."

"Listen, Len!" exclaimed the McMurray as he climbed the next stool. "We can hire that little room next to ours for three dollars a week. You go cinch it to-night."

"What's the idea? Do I deal stud-poker in it? I'm shocked, Bo, after you made me quit. Of course, if there's no other way to make an honest living and get educated, I'll go to the bat."

"You are an ornery, low-minded cow-puncher in spite of me," sighed Bowman. "Think of Red's father, th' Reverend Doctor John Calvin Mercer, of th' Northern Presbyterian Church, ever hearing

you made a break like that! He'd know for sure you'd contam'nate good old Red. What we need that little room for is The Lone Star Pressing Corporation, Limited."

"Press what? Hay, cotton, or pants?" drawled Garretson, who seldom betrayed surprise.

"Pants, an' so forth," explained Bowman. "It's a new idea in Somersworth. It's so much trouble to wrap their clothes up and tote 'em to the tailor's, and then fetch the things home again, that the very best citizens just naturally look rumpled. I learned how to press my own clothes at home, Len, and I can do that little trick."

"How do you know these folks want to be all natty and pressed up, Bo?"

"I submitted the proposition this afternoon," was the dignified reply. "Each an' every client of The Lone Star Pressing Corporation gets a card with our motto, '*Don't Be Mussed Up. It Hurts Your Self-Respect!*'—and we punch the card whenever he has a suit pressed. It entitles him to two suits a week for a month, all for five dollars. If he wants to put in an extra pair of pants, not too often, we'll call it his bonus. I believe in encouragin' the goodwill of your clients."

"Show me how to put the creases in, boy, and I'll go on the night shift," said the admiring Garretson kid. "You actually found easy marks that fell for it?"

"Ten already, Len. One of my arguments was that a good old town like Somersworth ought not

to bag at the knees. I collected twenty dollars in cash after giving Mr. Fayette Caldwell's name as reference. The rest will loosen up when we get the cards printed. If you honestly want to join the corporation, old man, you're entitled to half the profits."

"Foolish, but suit yourself," said "Len." "Anything for peace in the family."

The little room was speedily fitted with two long tables and electric irons, the cards printed, and more business solicited. Evidently The Lone Star Pressing Corporation filled a long-felt want, and perhaps the partners themselves inspired a feeling of cordial interest and sympathy. It was reflected in the attitude of Colonel Harris Shelby, venerable patriarch of a thousand acres, who had built himself a handsome house in town and handed over the farm to his sons. He was a Kentucky gentleman of the old breed, suave, gentle, and intrepid, who considered it his duty to return the call of young Mr. Leonard Garretson and make the acquaintance of the other visitor, Mr. Bowman McMurray. They needed no other recommendation than the endorsement of Fayette Caldwell. And so it happened that a knock on the door at the head of the stairs interrupted Bowman in the act of perspiring over a client's suit of clothes. "Len" admitted the gaunt, white-haired old man, who leaned on a cane and swept off his broad, black hat as he courteously exclaimed:

"If I intrude, my dear boy, you-all must pardon

me. My wife requests yo' company to dinner on Sunday, and it is a pleasure—"

"Walk right in, Colonel Shelby," exclaimed Bowman, slipping on his coat. "This is an honor, believe me. Chuck that pile of clothes off the chair, Len. They haven't been pressed yet."

The visitor surveyed the scene with an amused yet slightly critical expression in his kindly, wrinkled face. Twisting an end of his white moustache, he ventured:

"One or two folks don't quite approve of this performance,—a little beneath the dignity of young gentlemen,—but I tell 'em they ought to be proud of you. I have the honah to be one of yo' subscribers."

"Yes, suh," eagerly replied Bowman. "You bought two cards and it looks like you are sending us all the clothes you could find in the closets."

Colonel Harris Shelby smiled in a guilty manner as he confessed: "My wife, Miss' Ella, was sayin' the same thing. When I dragged that bell-waisted old dress-coat out of the attic, she laughed at me. But why be mussed up, boys, as The Lone Star Corporation so fo'cefully expresses a profound truth? How's business? Any stock for sale?"

"We're 'Limited,' " said Bowman. "When school opens Monday we'll have to refuse any new clients. I understand you went to Centre College, Colonel."

"And my father, and my two sons after me, Mr. McMurray. Three generations of Boyle County Shelbys, and more to come, I hope. Some of my

friends have preferred to send their boys to the State University at Lexington, or up no'th to Princeton and Harvard. But a small college that isn't tryin' so infernally hard to be bigger instead of better still pleases our old-fogey ideas. When yo' business slacks up, I shall be delighted to drive you over to Danville in my car. It is a very beautiful old campus."

"Much obliged, Colonel Shelby," answered Bowman. "We are crazy to see the college, but what with school and football an' everything beginning so soon, it is some busy life. How is football at old Centre this year?"

"I'm ashamed of my ignorance, son, but I don't know. I never did go to see but one game, and it looked like a riot to me. It's safe to say Centre College won't make much of a splash, with only a hundred students."

"That don't worry McMurray," observed Garretson. "He says wait till next year. He'll be there. It takes only eleven men to make a team."

"The Stars and Stripes would never have waved over the grand old State of Texas," declaimed Bowman, "if your grand-daddy, Len, and the rest of 'em had stopped to take a census of the enemy."

This noble outburst was applauded by Colonel Shelby, who declared that if Texas and Kentucky joined forces on the football field, God help the other fellows. He lingered for a long call, anxious to make the visitors feel at home in Somersworth, arranging dinners and dances with the young folks

of the town, and gently ignoring the fact that The Lone Star Pressing Corporation would have little time for society.

They reported at the high school on Monday morning and were assigned to classes by a youthful principal whose gracious manner reminded them of their beloved Fayette Caldwell. They won his heart by the evident determination to strive for excellence and make a record in every way. The Garretson boy had been aroused by his partner's fiery ambition and had no intention of lagging behind. What helped to drive them both was the keen desire to send such reports to Fort Hawley as should persuade the doting parents of "Red" Mercer to send him along to Somersworth with the least possible delay. He was a reward of merit.

It was discovered that the eleven would have to depend upon the coaching of two or three school alumni who lived in the town and an occasional visitor from the Centre College squad. It was not a large or wealthy school and the athletic funds were meagre. The captain, Duncan Fordney, was a senior of eighteen, who resembled Leonard Garretson in looks and temperament. Both had lived much out of doors and were at home with horses, guns, and dogs. They had been raised close to the soil. All this inspired easy acquaintance and mutual confidence.

Before long the captain and his followers began to comprehend that in the stocky, impetuous quarter-back, Bowman McMurray, they had gained

both a leader and a player who surpassed them all. There was some jealousy, that Texas should outshine Kentucky, but Duncan Fordney soon smothered this feeling. And he was such a fine young sportsman that, after a fortnight, he went to see the partners of The Lone Star Pressing Corporation, Limited. It was fairly late in the evening, but the McMurray was engaged in ironing the dignified garments of the judge of the circuit court while Garretson read aloud and translated the next day's Latin lesson. It was a display of efficiency in corporation management which would have done credit to one of your snappy young experts with a set of charts and blue-prints who installs a system with a punch.

"Sit down, Fordney, old man," cordially exclaimed Bowman. "You don't mind my finishin' this suit of clothes? The judge has to hop out on the early morning train. It's made a lot of talk, what a grand object he really is since we took charge of him. He used to look as if he had slept in 'em."

"It will be a town without a wrinkle in it, if you fellows don't weaken," said the admiring Fordney. "You must be going shy of sleep. How the dickens do you get away with it?"

"Well, we're sort of strugglin' along till Red Mercer drifts in," explained Bowman. "He has all the brains of the outfit. Then we figure things will ease up. He will make everything in school seem so perfectly simple that we can absorb it through

our pores. And it will give us another hot-iron juggler. You increase your workin' force thirty-three an' a third per cent and it's bound to show results."

"Well, what I dropped in to say,—" hesitated Fordney,— "was to put a proposition up to you. Please don't misunderstand it, McMurray, and think I'm sore or the team has turned against me. I want to resign and let them elect you captain for the rest of the season."

"Forget it, Dunc," advised Garretson. "I have to live with this bird. He is liable to turn brutal. On the level, what's wrong? You're playing a beautiful game on the end and the spirit of the team is fine."

"For one thing, we are shy a regular coach, Len. The responsibility worries me and I'll be playing my position worse instead of better unless I can get out from under. I fret too easy. But the big argument is that McMurray will make a winning captain."

"And so will you, old man," loyally protested Bowman. "Anyhow, the team isn't liable to stand for an outsider from Texas. Let me tell you, Fordney, I think you are the ideal kind of a man to be captain of a team. It's the influence that counts."

"We have found you a good sportsman," smiled the young Kentuckian. "You play clean and hard and refuse to stand for the anything-to-win stuff. The fellows will stand back of you. I've talked it over with them."

"If you-all want me, I'll think it over," replied Bowman, "but I couldn't accept until the last three or four weeks of the season. By that time you may change your mind. Len and I simply can't take on any heavier work till Red Mercer shows up. This plant is running to capacity."

"Do you really expect Mercer? If we could only get a centre-rush like him—"

"It's ten'tive, Fordney. We expect to send reports at the end of our first month up here, and if they don't make a dent in the Mercer family, I'll eat my hat."

"There is only one game that I am really nervous about," said the Somersworth captain. "It's with the Buford School. We never had any trouble, but I hear they are makin' war medicine. Some fool or other stirred them up about our playing ringers from Texas. It's their coach that is the bad actor, I reckon. He's hard-boiled, so they say,—name of Stenton and nothing to do but spend the money his father left him. He played at Princeton till he was kicked out for a gamblin' scrape."

"He interests me," spoke up the Garretson kid. "I am a reformed gambler myself. Ask McMurray. What do you suppose this gay buckero aims to do to our team?"

"Oh, rough stuff. Lay for you Texans and put the fear of God into you, I imagine."

"That listens cheerful to me," said Bowman. "We are liable to get action, Len. And there's people who refuse to take football seriously, call it

a sport for boys! Now, Duncan Fordney, we like you, understand, and this town has welcomed us like a couple of long-lost heirs. Kentucky is our adopted State. I think we ought to init'ate him, Len. It's very exclusive, but Dunc qualifies, in my opinion."

Leonard Garretson nodded assent and held up *four* fingers, close together as he murmured:

"*Just like this.* The other one is Red Mercer, Dunc, old scout. You'll drift with us, of course, over to Centre College after this year."

"Unless I drop dead," cried Fordney, tremendously gratified by the honor so formally conferred.

At the end of the month of probation and experiment which they had stipulated for themselves, Bowman set out to garner a crop of commendations. The principal of the school furnished them with satisfactory report cards to which he added a few lines of personal approval. The delighted McMurray then paid his respects to Colonel Harris Shelby, who was confined to the house by a touch of rheumatism. The errand was gravely explained, and the fine old gentleman replied that it was an honor to contribute a written testimonial of the esteem in which the two young men were held by the very best people of Somersworth. He wrote the letter with painstaking deliberation, the hand that held the pen rather tremulous, and said, with his gently humorous smile:

"There, boy, you could borrow money on that document anywhere in the Blue Grass. This Dr.

John Calvin Mercer sounds like a powerful hard nut to crack. Does he belong to the No'thern Presbyterian sect?"

"He does, Colonel. All the way from Mass'-chusetts."

"Hum-m, boy, I'm afraid you're up against the old Abolitionist breed. They have to be hit in the head with an axe before you can make 'em listen to argument."

This forecast failed to depress the hopeful McMurray, who spent the next evening in preparing a budget, or trial balance, of the operations of The Lone Star Pressing Corporation, Limited. It demonstrated that the monthly receipts of the corporation would be sufficient to support a third partner, namely, John Calvin Mercer, Junior, if not in luxury at least with a bed and three square meals per diem. The figures spoke for themselves, but the general manager made them speak more eloquently in his letter which read as follows:

DEAR RED:

Please show the enclosed contents to your father and be firm and tactful with him. Parents have to be shown, for their minds get stiffened up as old age creeps on. The financial statement has everything on it but overhead and depreciashun which don't amount to much. You can bank on forty dollars a month and living is cheap and we get invited out to meals often. For an infant concern, Colonel Shelby says we look as sound as a rock. And with your well-known bug for mathematics, we can probably cut down costs and things.

The other enclosed contents give us studious and moral characters which may surprise you about Len Garretson who used to be a lazy hound, though a perfect corker in other respects. I have outgrown my fighting habits, but at the same time it's not safe for anybody to knock the grand old State of Texas. You ought to come right now, Red, old man, for a team from Buford talks about wiping us off the map. The rumor is that Len and I had better reserve our cots in the hospital and avoid the rush. Better not mention this to your father. He may be fussy about your getting stove up.

By the way, if you happen to be playing chess with Nan Overton any time (and it's too bad she has to have that wished on her), please give her the hopeless and far-distant regards of one who prays for her future. This is the feeling of a disinterested party.

Yours in the bonds

Bo McMurray

CHAPTER VII

IN PURSUIT OF HIS TROUSERS

LIFE was no idle pastime, and one extraordinarily crowded day after another slid past without a response from those persuasive documents which were expected to cause a dent in the Northern Presbyterian manse of Fort Hawley, Texas. The impatient McMurray was for sending a telegram, but the calm young Garretson would have none of it. The cards were on the table, said he, and all they could do was play the hand out. A telegram would make the minister r'ar and pitch. It would be like a cockle-burr under the saddle. A man ought to get into heaven on credentials like those, and it was therefore reasonable to expect them to convert even a hard-shelled Presbyterian.

"It's like this, Bo," surmised "Len," with some glimmering recollection of dogmatic theology. "We may lose out in spite of the elegant exhibit. If the old man don't believe Red is predestinated to come to Kentucky, we can't budge him. He'll just bat his eyes and lay his ears back. It had to be all figured out a million years ago."

Bowman' sighed and was unable to controvert such an appalling statement as this. All he could comment was:

"Just because Red happened to be born a Presbyterian, we may be out of luck."

And still no word came from the manse, and the Buford Academy game was close at hand. Captain Duncan Fordney had been increasingly perturbed by the stories which came to his ears from various sources. He conjectured that some of them had been deliberately concocted to frighten him. If Somersworth intended to play the "Texas ringers," Buford proposed to even it up by sending two or three husky mountaineers who were taking special courses for the autumn term. What made them truly happy was to whip their weight in wildcats, or revenue officers. In previous years there had been no bad blood between the schools, and this new spirit of hostility was inferred to be the work of that misguided football tutor, Dick Stenton, whom Princeton had so unfeelingly exiled. It was his vicious notion that such tactics would put the fighting edge on the Buford eleven.

These visitors arrived in Somersworth late in the afternoon of the day before the game. With them came thirty or forty adherents, most of them quiet, well-mannered youngsters who regarded the trip as a holiday adventure. There were perhaps a dozen older men, of the sporting stamp, who were always ready to back the home town in any sort of a contest, horses, game-cocks, or football. They were of the type which Dick Stenton would be apt to find congenial. Several of them were his cronies, jovial, hard-bitted, and reckless. They were anx-

ious to bet for the fun of it, and intended to make Somersworth put up or shut up.

Duncan Fordney and a few of his players called at the hotel after supper and courteously endeavored to make the acquaintance of their opponents. The Buford lads were polite, but by no means cordial, and Dick Stenton sent them early to their rooms. They needed the sleep, said he, but the real intention was to prevent any amiable fraternizing. Shortly thereafter he climbed into an automobile with three of his friends and was seen to depart in the direction of the Lexington Pike. It is not bringing a false accusation against the young man to assume that he had got wind of the chicken-fight which was to be held in a barn some ten miles distant.

It was toward midnight when he returned to the hotel, in a vile temper and looking like a tramp. Rain had been falling for two or three hours, the road was slippery with mud, and the driver must have been drunk, he explained to the night clerk. The car had shot into a ditch and dug its condemned nose into a clay bank and all hands had toiled to pry it out with fence-rails. He was wet and dirty and had not brought an extra suit of clothes in his bag, and how in blazes could he hope to look respectable in the morning and turn up at the football game?

"Perhaps I can get them sponged and pressed for you by breakfast time," suggested the elderly night-clerk. "I can try anyhow, Mr. Stenton."

"Is there as much pep as that in this jay hamlet? You are a life-saver. I'll go upstairs and peel off these unspeakable duds. Can you come up for them?"

"A nigger boy will be right along, Mr. Stenton. I'm keeping him on late watch to-night."

The frolicsome young gentleman from Buford vanished in a pleasanter state of mind and soon found bodily comfort in silken pajamas. The "black boy" to whom he pitched out the soggy suit of clothes was middle-aged and round-shouldered, an humble partisan of the Somersworth football team on which he had dared to wager three dollars. With the bundle under his arm he trudged out into the rainy night and grumbled to himself:

"If Bo McMurray has done put hisself to bed, I ain't gwine rouse him up for no racketin' wild man from Buford. Shake him out o' his sound sleep an' I risks losin' mah good money to-morrer."

He toiled into a side street and was heartened by the unlooked-for gleam in the upper windows where was installed The Lone Star Pressing Corporation. Both partners were still astir and, after delivering the bundle, the messenger delayed to expostulate:

"Them Buford boys'll trim you good if you don't be recup'ratin' yo'self better'n this."

"Rush of business, Sam," explained Bowman. "Our clients seem anxious to be spruced up for the game, 'specially the young ones. What's the gossip around the hotel?"

"Buford folks terrible chesty an' stepping wide

an' high, Mistah Bo McMurray. Talk like they gwine tromple us. If it was me pressin' this yere Stenton man's clo'es, I'd make him pine for 'em."

"They will be delivered before breakfast. Good-night, Sam."

The sleepy-headed Garretson sighed and muttered angry words at this belated affliction, but his partner told him to roll into bed. This job could be done in the early morning, and, anyhow, the clothes would have to be dried in front of the coal stove and the mud brushed off. Before hanging them over the chairs, Bowman began turning the pockets inside out to facilitate the drying process. In a trousers pocket he discovered a damp, crumpled sheet of paper which he handled carefully and smoothed out on an ironing-table. As a memorandum which might be valuable to the owner, he decided to pass a hot iron over it and then place it in an envelope for safe-keeping.

Idly at first, he noticed that the sheet of paper was covered with figures in orderly rows and columns. There were numerals in series with dashes between and certain letters or abbreviations to designate them. It was oddly unlike a business notation, in dollars and cents, such as one would be apt to find in a man's pocket. Bowman McMurray shoved the iron to one side and stared at the creased, bedraggled sheet of paper. This was a code of some kind and it interested him intensely. Then, in a flash, he comprehended what it was. He was leaning over the table, his chin in his hand,

frowning at the blurred but legible columns and series of figures, and perhaps there was a moment of hesitation while he was conscious of the temptation so extraordinary and opportune.

It was a crisis, no less momentous than that which confronts the financier, the merchant, or the statesman when an issue may be won by giving expediency the right of way over principle. And many of them, alas, have chosen the easier way. To the vision of this lad in his teens a football game was as great a stake to play for as a fortune, a treaty, or an election is to those in high places.

What Bowman McMurray did was to shut his eyes very tight, as though afraid he might learn too much if he saw that sheet of paper one second longer. Then he turned the sheet over so that the blank side was uppermost and left it upon the table while he walked slowly into the other room where the two cots were side by side. His partner had kicked off his clothes, dived into bed, and was submerged in slumber, all within the space of five minutes. To drag him back to the surface was a cruel thing to do, likewise laborious, but Bowman shook him and slapped him and rumpled his hair until the victim groaned and let both fists fly at his tormentor.

"Ouch, Bo, you murderer! Quit it. Is the house on fire? Go 'way from me and let her burn."

"You *must* wake up and listen, Len. Souse your head in cold water an' please come to."

Very peevishly the somnolent partner permitted

himself to be dragged in to the table where he collapsed in a chair. It was like a shock from a live wire, however, when Bowman dramatically shouted at him:

"You know what I found on that wet piece of paper? *Buford's signals!* The whole set, for every play and formation! And the key for a switch when they want to change 'em during the game."

"You're locoed, Bo. Who said 'switch'? You fell asleep at it," scoffed the partner whose head was still full of cobwebs.

"In Dick Stenton's pants, where he overlooked it," resumed Bowman. "He was tired and perhaps he had sneaked a few drinks. Here is my theory, Len, and it sounds reasonable. This Dick Stenton is a mean buzzard, in football, anyhow, and he just naturally gets suspicious of everybody else. He may think we sent a scout to get wise to his signals and so he framed up a different system for the game with Somersworth. That would explain his havin' the paper in his pocket."

Garretson did not appear to be listening. There were thoughts of his own to hold his attention. Presently he came out of his trance to say:

"They intend to ride us to-morrow, don't they? And win any old way? What did you do with the paper, Bo?"

"What would you have done with it, Len, old man?" was the tremendously anxious question.

"Well, I wobbled for a minute," answered the Garretson kid, with his slow, reflective smile, "but

the only thing to do is put the paper away and forget it. Seal it up, Bo. I don't have to tell you."

"It was a narrow escape," confessed Bowman. "But I didn't look at the signals long enough to do me any good. Well, old man, that would be an awful way to win a football game, or anything else. I'll drop around to the hotel before breakfast, with the clothes, and hand the sealed envelope to Dick Stenton an' explain things."

"I reckon I'll sit in with you," said the Garretson kid, now thoroughly awake. "A hombre like this Stenton may have to be explained to a whole lot."

The important scrap of paper was cautiously folded and placed in the guardian envelope. Bowman fingered it as though it might blow up in his hands. The transaction was possessed of a certain solemnity. It was much more than a trifling episode in the careers of these two young men who were more than ever partners in word and thought and deed. With minds serene and untroubled they earnestly proceeded to gather a few hours of sleep.

This part of the night had been interrupted also for Mr. Richard Stenton, of Buford. In his room at the hotel he had found it difficult to woo repose. His nerves may have been a trifle ragged, after a recent trip to Louisville, and he could not seem to keep his thoughts away from his football team, and the bed was cursedly hard and uncomfortable. The result was that he fitfully walked the floor in bathrobe and slippers and smoked one cigarette

after another. At length he pawed over the letters and so on which had been flung upon the bureau when he emptied his pockets. The piece of paper which he sought could not be found. He was deprived of a man's hopeful solace of rummaging through his clothes again.

Excessively annoyed, young Mr. Stenton paced the room with increased energy, but quieted a little as he reflected that a tailor would never bother to examine the sheet of paper anyhow, and it would be returned with his clothes in the morning. Mr. Stenton was not in a tranquil humor, however, and trouble is never so easily borrowed as when one walks the floor in the wee, small hours. He became fretful again and convinced himself that to let that copy of the secret signal code go astray, while he was in the camp of the enemy, was an utterly damn-fool performance. He wished he knew where the tailor's shop was. It might be prudent to find out, on the chance that the clothes might be delayed in the morning.

Still sleepless and fidgety, Dick Stenton wandered into the hall and so downstairs to the hotel office. Any excuse for a little conversation was welcome. The night-clerk nodded behind the desk like a bald-headed owl and black Sam snored in a tilted chair. The uneasy guest propounded a question so harmless and simple that he could not foresee the startling consequences.

"Howdy, Mister, where did you send that suit of mine?"

"Sam carried it to McMurray and Garretson, two boys that press clothes for the best gentlemen in town, Mr. Stenton. They do a first-class job and you needn't worry about prompt delivery."

"McMurray and Garretson?" shouted the guest, surprisingly red in the face. "Why, those are the names of those Texas ringers on the Somersworth team! You *have* raised the devil with me!"

Sam ceased to snore and clattered out of his chair, nor did he soothe Mr. Stenton by ejaculating:

"They sho'ly gwine raise it with Buford, an' mah three dollars say so. Yes, suh, it won't be no pants-pressin' exhibition when Bo McMurray an' Len Garretson cut loose. Man, she'll be an ol' steam-roller."

Robust and fast on his feet was young Mr. Richard Stenton, although his florid face was a trifle puffy, and Sam escaped damage by scrambling behind the cigar counter. The elderly night-clerk, unused to scenes of violence, was at a loss to solve the problem of a daffy guest who was attempting homicide in a bathrobe and slippers.

"Come out of that, you worthless, black scoundrel," roared Mr. Stenton. "Where do these miserable, double-dyed, pant-pressin' Texas outlaws live? Pick up your feet and show me, now."

"My Gawd, Mistah Stenton, yo' ain't even got yo' own pants on an' it's rainin'. Calm yo'self, please, suh. Them boys done tol' me befo' breakfast, sha'p."

"A five-dollar note if you help me find those

trousers," coaxed Stenton, who perceived that diplomacy was better than violence. "They may have let them alone until morning."

"Five dollahs talks persuasive, suh," affirmed Sam. "An' I'll bet it all ag'in' Buford. Lemme find an umbrella. You suttinly is pressed fo' time."

"Another joke like that and I'll peel your hide off," barked the unhappy Richard Stenton as he clutched the negro by the arm and hustled him into the street. The night was wet and chill and it would have been much wiser to borrow garments from other Buford visitors, but the Stenton blood was rash and impulsive. What it wanted it endeavored to get, and the devil take the laggard. Sam breathed hard and exerted his bandy legs to keep the pace. Rudely disturbing the two football players looked like stormy business to him, but he offered no advice. He was hand in hand with trouble, either way.

The hall door was unlocked and they climbed the stairs, Stenton charging ahead and pounding on the door. All was silent within. He beat another tattoo and rattled the knob. Then he began to shout.

Bowman McMurray rolled over, rubbed his eyes, and sat up in bed. Sufferin' catfish, was he to get no sleep at all? The weary Garretson kid slumbered in an oblivion dreamless and profound. And now the agitated accents of black Sam could be heard entreating Richard Stenton:

"These ain't no chillun yo' pesterin', please, suh.

They is hard boys from Texas an' I wouldn't rile 'em. When they come they is liable to come a-shootin'!"

"Nonsense! They're a pair of counterfeits," snapped Stenton. "Hush your fuss."

"Mebbe they jes' wo'k here an' sleep somewheres else," suggested Sam. "Let's ramble, Mistah Stenton. I don't feel like stoppin' no bullet for no white man's pair o' pants."

Bowman McMurray, listening to this spirited dialogue, was of the opinion that Mr. Stenton's behavior was beneath notice. He would receive his trousers at the appointed hour, also a sealed envelope. Of course he was on the rampage about that signal code, but it was disgustingly ungentlemanly of him to suspect that The Lone Star Pressing Corporation might use the sheet of paper to its own advantage. He couldn't kick the door down, and what was the sense in paying any more attention to him? With this, the rational McMurray let his head fall upon the pillow and it was a finished episode for him.

The heartless clamor of the alarm clock conveyed to his drugged senses that here was another day, and he was cooking breakfast in the other room when Garretson shuffled in to say:

"Did somebody knock a while ago? Did I dream it?"

"They tried to knock the house down, that's all. It was Dick Stenton raving for his pants. He missed 'em dreadfully, to judge by the symptoms. You know why."

"He interests me more than ever, Bo. I see his clothes are still here. I wouldn't miss the fun of delivering 'em for a good deal. You and I will wait till he comes downstairs for breakfast. His friends will be with him, naturally."

"We won't start anything," observed Bowman. "It wouldn't do, Len. This is our town now, and we must be mighty particular about its honor an' so forth."

"Kentucky can't give me any lessons in honor. I come from the State of Texas," said the son of the Garretson clan.

It was not a boast, but the quiet statement of a creed which had been handed down from other generations of long, loose-gaited, slow-spoken men who lived in the wide spaces and knew the winds and the sky. It is worth mention, perhaps, that young Garretson dressed with unusual care. Bowman McMurray felt the same prompting. And there was more to it than the niceties of appearance. Their demeanor was dignified, what one might call sedately grown-up. They were men, in fact, made so by the demands of this occasion. The sentimental Bowman had touched the responsive chord. Honor was the essential thing.

They were at the hotel punctually on the minute. The suit of clothes, neatly folded in a pasteboard box, was sent up to the room of Mr. Richard Stenton with a message that Mr. Garretson and Mr. McMurray would be pleased to see him at his convenience. The boy returned with the word that

the gentleman would be down directly. The dining-room opened out of the lobby or office and two or three of the men from Buford were strolling in as Dick Stenton came charging down the stairs. They waited for him and observed that he seemed much upset about something. There was a danger signal in the black scowl and the headlong haste. One of them, Harry Noble, was a jovial, big-bodied man, a famous breeder of racing-stock, who stepped forward to say:

"What's wrong, Dick? Bad news from somewhere?"

"Nothing much, Harry. A little business with a pair of young rough-necks on this Somersworth eleven. Go on in to breakfast. I'll see you directly."

Stenton did not trouble himself to speak softly. Harry Noble whispered something, but the reproof was ignored. The other men appeared disturbed and lingered at the dining-room door. At this awkward moment the captain of the Buford team sauntered down, a strapping young six-footer, and advanced to shake hands with McMurray and Garretson whom he had already met. One glance at the coach and he surmised that some sort of a squall was brewing. His own relations with Mr. Richard Stenton had not been altogether happy and congenial. It was apparent that the audience increased Stenton's irritation and he brusquely told the Buford captain:

"This is a personal matter, Cottrell. I'll explain later. Chase yourself."

Bowman McMurray interposed, and he spoke in a voice of command.

"Captain Cottrell stays. This meeting will adjourn into the little writing-room. You aren't staging this show all by yourself, Mr. Stenton. Now, Len, you go 'phone Dunc Fordney and tell him to come right away. He ought to make it in five minutes. The two captains had better be in on this."

Garretson obeyed, but reluctantly, afraid he might miss the first round. The McMurray had no intention, however, of letting the situation get out of hand. A dramatic moment was apt to find him equal to it. Dick Stenton was evidently taken aback. He had expected to bully and insult a pair of school-boys, very much as he was in the habit of abusing a squad of football players. His demeanor was a shade less truculent and he seemed a little perplexed as he said to McMurray:

"Why all this pomp and ceremony? All I have to say to you is that I carelessly left an important memorandum in one of my pockets and you failed to send it back. You know why you kept it, don't you?"

"We preferred to return it in person, Mr. Stenton," was the formal response. Bowman held the sealed envelope in his hand, but he deferred surrendering it until his partner should rejoin him.

"That is a childish bluff," snarled Stenton. "It was easy enough for you to make a copy, of course."

The ruddy, good-natured Harry Noble now left

his companions and took Stenton by the arm. This accusation of theft was not a thing to be bawled in public. It was obviously more serious than a squabble over football details. Shoving the coach in the direction of the writing-room, Harry whispered:

"Soft-pedal it, you hot-headed fool! Two to one you are in wrong again. Do you want these Somersworth folks to run you out of town? You go shoutin' around that these boys are crooks and you're liable to canter up the pike with a fence-rail between your legs."

Garretson came hurrying back from the telephone booth and reported that the Somersworth captain was already burning the wind.

"Trail into the writing-room, Len, and ride herd until I come," said Bowman. "I want to talk to Duncan Fordney for a minute or two. Just keep this Dick Stenton amused, understand. Don't land on his jaw, for Heaven's sake!"

"Nary a riffle, boy. All quiet along the Rio Grande."

Intercepting Duncan Fordney on the sidewalk, Bowman rapidly explained the course of events. The Somersworth captain was a gentle lad who had been shielded from the world's rough knocks, petted perhaps too much at home, and not self-confident. Courageous and swift as a player, he had more and more realized that he was not a leader. It was not cowardice, but eagerness to fit the man to the emergency which impelled him to say:

"I know you told me you couldn't take over my job, Bowman, but we never expected such a rumpus as this. It's you that will have to put this nuisance of a Dick Stenton in his place, and you ought to have the authority to back it up."

"Just for to-day, you mean, Duncan? Acting captain for the Buford game? I won't take it on a permanent basis."

"I wish you would, but you will take charge to-day, anyhow?"

"Well, I may have to spring something that will scandalize the team and the town," declared Bowman, "and if I do, the square thing is for me to be the goat. All right, old man. Let's go."

They went into the writing-room and Fordney withdrew to one side with young Cottrell, the Buford captain. There was no lack of good sportsmanship between these two fine athletes. The broad-shouldered Harry Noble stood with his back against the door. He had invited himself as representing the sentiment of the Buford visitors and he looked as though he wished himself well out of it. Mr. Richard Stenton's temperature had been cooling and he was more the master of himself, but this made him no less unpleasant. He was jaunty, patronizing, and cock-sure. With a laugh he said to McMurray:

"It was my fault. I'm stung. Too late to drill my team in another set of signals."

Bowman McMurray laid the sealed envelope upon the table between them. It was simply done,

without gesture or flourish. In this the boy was unconsciously the artist.

"You take it for granted, Mr. Stenton, that we learned your signals. It's perfectly rotten of you to think such a thing. There they are, just as we found the paper. There is nothing to prevent your using that set of signals against us this afternoon. Is there, Len?"

"Nothing a-tall," drawled the Garretson kid, "except this bird's suspicions which sort of throw back on himself. A man that refuses to trust anybody else is generally too—er—too warped to lay in bed, so my dad says."

Stenton flared up and stuck his chin forward in that formidable pose which was presumed to cow the spirit of a school-boy. Garretson gazed wistfully at that aggressive chin, but resolutely clasped his hands behind him as he murmured:

"The cross on the diagram shows where the body was found."

"Any more of that talk and I'll throw you both out!" shouted the angry Mr. Stenton. As a college freshman he had taken pride in the sobriquet of "Slugger Dick." He was not aware that they also bred them in Texas.

"Don't hit him, Len!" begged Bowman. "I'll promise if you will. He has a tobacco heart, prob'ly. You might stop his clock."

The Buford captain, Alfred Cottrell, thought it time to suggest, and he spoke sharply:

"You are getting nowhere at all, Mr. Stenton,

and I feel pretty well disgusted. If you think these fellows are liars, why don't you say so and take the consequences? I believe they told you the truth."

Mr. Stenton ignored this advice. It was not customary to call a man a liar, either in Kentucky or Texas, unless one was prepared for eventualities. That seasoned observer, Harry Noble, now showed the trend of his sympathy.

"Dick, if you go on provokin' these boys, we'll have to send you back to Buford in a long, wooden box with a wreath on it. You are making a ridiculous ass of yourself."

This staggered the wrong-headed Stenton. His own friends were quitting him. But he was in no humor to retract or conciliate.

"The football game will be a joke, Harry," he protested. "We are licked before we start. Better hedge your bets."

"A tin-horn sport. He don't sound like Kentucky," confided Garretson to Duncan Fordney.

Bowman McMurray had been reflectively rubbing his nose. Now he squared his solid shoulders and his honest gray eye sparkled as he exclaimed:

"Go ahead and use your signals that you say we stole, Coach Stenton. Do you know what Somersworth intends to do? *We will play our game without any signals at all.* I'll call every play in advance and your team will hear what we intend to do next. And we'll whip that outfit of yours."

"Called, by Godfrey!" roared Harry Noble.

"Dick, you put your fool head in the trap and McMurray sprung it. And you can't pull out again."

"But I can't stand for anything like that," spluttered Stenton, all the wind spilled out of his sails. "It puts me in an impossible position."

"That is exactly it," retorted Harry Noble, who was a sportsman to the last hair of his head. "If you decline to use your blankety system of signals, you publicly charge these Somersworth boys with dirty work. You can't afford to do that, Dick. I'm tellin' you. Where's your alibi?"

Duncan Fordney was thunderstruck. He had anticipated no such counter-stroke as this declaration of Bowman McMurray. It was magnificent, but it was not war. However, his own fine sense of chivalry told him that a question of honor was never debatable.

"We play without signals, as Captain McMurray says," was his loyal verdict.

Captain "Al" Cottrell, of Buford, laid a hand upon Fordney's shoulder as he said:

"I shall try my best to win. I can't do anything else. But I'm sure we are going to be friends, win or lose."

"Here's to that!" exclaimed Bowman McMurray. "But your coach will have a darned unhappy day, either way it breaks."

CHAPTER VIII

A POINT OF HONOR IS NEVER DEBATABLE

A TRIFLING incident in the autumn calendar of sport was this contest between two small schools of Kentucky, and yet perhaps it contributed a little something toward answering the eternal question—What is education? The campus does not make men. It gives them an opportunity to find themselves. The main concern is not what they get out of it, but what they put into it. For lack of passing marks in character, the colleges are cluttered up with aimless boys who ought to be somewhere else. Life has been made too soft for them. They have never learned to strive for anything.

Such preachments as this would have rolled off young Bowman McMurray like water from a duck's back. Experience had already hammered into him the conviction that nothing worth while came easy, and it was also his fixed opinion that you were sure to hate yourself unless you played the game on the level, so why waste your breath in arguing the obvious? It was a spirit which rejoiced in giving the adversary an advantage, if possible, like offering him the choice of weapons, and such is the instinct of all good men and true, whether it be in love or war or the quest of golden fortune.

Although his defiance of Mr. Richard Stenton

had left the knightly soul of the McMurray unperturbed, it harrowed the feelings of several of his football squad who were to be offered up as a sacrifice to honor. The Christian martyrs gained great glory, but it was posthumous, and when they were thrown to the lions they failed to share the holiday pleasure of the spectators. Captain McMurray, acting, met his comrades-in-arms in the basement of the high-school building when they gathered to don armor for the fray. Having squirmed into a torn jersey and clapped on his leather helmet, the leader stood with arms akimbo and chewed gum while he framed a brief address. The dismal countenances of two or three younger players suggested that an elegy would be appropriate. "Len" Garretson was methodically lacing his shoes while he whistled, "Turkey in the Straw."

"Listen, boys," said Bowman, in a steady voice, but his emotion was so near the surface that his eyes filled. "Your regular captain, Duncan Fordney, has told you what happened at the hotel this morning. There was nothing else for me to do, nothing else in God's world. If any of you don't agree with me, it's too late to go back on the returns. The men who have been coachin' us, on and off, say I was dead right, and they will be proud of the team, sink or swim. So much for that.

"Now if you go in against this Buford outfit with the idea that you're whipped because I intend to call the plays and use no secret signals, that's exactly what you'll get. If this Dick Stenton is as poor

a coach as he is a gentleman, they don't know enough football to give 'em a headache. The decent men on his team are ashamed of his performance—the captain, Al Cottrell, said as much when the smoke cleared this morning—and that is sure to help us."

"But, say, Cap'n McMurray, did you see the couple of hill-billies who are going to play in the line?" faltered a boyish guard who was very light for his position. "They're bears!"

"Tease 'em, Joe. Spoil their tempers," said Bowman. "They prob'ly think football is a free-for-all. The officials are Centre College men and they know their job. That's all, boys. If any of you feel like saying your prayers before we go on, nobody will laugh at you. It won't mean that you're scared. I b'lieve in asking God to help a man deliver his punch, as long as you live up to the good old Bible text, 'Be sure you are right and then go ahead, for the Almighty hates a quitter.' "

The silence was respectful. It was a scene quite different from that in the hotel rooms where "Slugger Dick" Stenton was endeavoring to make his youthful athletes "mad enough to bite nails" by swearing and shaking his fist at them.

Gossip travels fast in a small town like Somersworth and the crowd at the field was much larger than expected. Automobiles were parked two and three deep, and from one of them a gaunt, masterful old gentleman with a white moustache extracted himself, the colored chauffeur lending him a hand.

Leaning on his cane, Colonel Harris Shelby surveyed the animated picture. Upon his breast was pinned a small rosette of blue and gray, the colors of the Somersworth School. There was something martial in his aspect. It may have been in the poise of the head, in the glance of those faded eyes which glowed with pride and with challenge, in the firmly set lips. He bowed to many a friend and neighbor, but tarried not until he reached a group of football players who were conferring with arms around one another's shoulders. Courteously waiting until they separated, Colonel Shelby advanced with hand outstretched and said to that grim young warrior, Bowman McMurray:

"Howdy, boy! The best wishes of an old Confederate soldier who knew what it was to fight in the last ditch when he was just about yo' age and size."

As surprised as he was pleased, Bowman replied:

"You bring us good luck, Colonel. How did it happen? You told me football was too much like a riot. This game is all set to be another one."

"Harry Noble came 'round to call, son. The Shelbys and Nobles are kin. His given name is Harris, after me. He tells me he was present at the quarrel which was forced on you by that blackguard, Dick Stenton. Permit me to apologize in the name of Kentucky. I regard you two boys as our guests. Having devoted his years to improvin' the breed of horses, Harry Noble knows a thoroughbred. Yo' behavior warrants such commendation."

"That's too much, Colonel," laughed Bowman. "A good many folks would call me a born fool. It's simply great to have you rooting for us."

Colonel Shelby looked down at the rosette on his coat. The colors revived memories of a distant and embattled youth. The blue and the gray! In such a spirit as these boys displayed had he ridden with "Jeb" Stuart and followed the Lost Cause to its grave at Appomattox. Raising his hat as a salute and a tribute, the Colonel exclaimed, and his voice rang clear:

"The odds never disturb brave men. Go in and give 'em hades."

A moment later the Buford squad scampered across the field and began to kick and pass the ball. They were heavy and powerful, this was the first impression, more like a college team. The two young mountaineers, concerning whom the rumors had been so alarming, resembled human battering-rams. This was what they were intended to be. Bowman McMurray grinned whenever he looked at them. They moved his sense of humor. This was a football game, not a weight-lifting match.

What he shrewdly suspected was that Dick Stenton, as a coach, had been too lazy to study the development of the science of football since his career at Princeton several years earlier. What he had learned then ought to be enough for a high-school eleven now. To shove the ball along by massed strength was a doctrine which the intelligent students of the sport were rapidly discarding.

It offered a new variety of strategy, complex, brilliant, baffling. This had been comprehended by Fayette Caldwell, that rising young attorney of Fort Hawley, and Bowman McMurray had been able to grasp the essential principle.

This theory may have been sound, but it received a severe shock at the very outset of the contest. Buford kicked off and the Somersworth full-back, "Len" Garretson, usually so unruffled and reliable, muffed the catch. As the ball rolled, a speeding Buford end-rusher fell upon it, and the enemy was within striking distance of the goal. Disaster was imminent. Dick Stenton's stalwart pupils were resolved to take no rash chances. They had the momentum to shove that ball along for downs, smashing at tackles and centre, the two mountaineers raging like young behemoths.

Relentlessly as a landslide, the ball was slowly advanced across one chalked line after another while McMurray's men splendidly flung themselves into the ruck and pulled the opponents down, but could not check that ponderous, slow-grinding machine. It scored a touch-down, the goal was kicked, and Buford had gained a tremendous confidence in its prowess.

Never mind, the battle was to the swift as well as to the strong! McMurray's first opportunity came when his team lined up and held the ball in its own possession. Tauntingly he shouted:

"No signals, boys! Plenty of time! Don't mind

the Buford ice-wagons! McMurray around the left end! Get into the interference! *Now!*"

An extraordinary thing happened, but it might not have surprised one familiar with the psychology of Mr. Richard Stenton, coach. Just before his team took the field he had cautioned them to look out for tricks. McMurray's stagey talk of discarding his signals might be tommy-rot, said he, a clever bluff to deceive them. The Buford captain, Cottrell, angrily told Stenton that he was all wrong, but three or four of the other players were visibly impressed. Therefore, when the agile Somersworth quarter-back, Bowman McMurray, shouted his intention and grabbed the ball to sprint for the left end of the line, more than one of the opponents suspected that he really meant to attempt to skirt the *right end.* There was a fatal instant of hesitation and confusion of purpose.

McMurray took advantage of it as he sped like a bullet, and precisely as announced, out across the field and clean past the men who should have dragged him down or turned him. Clearing the path raced "Len" Garretson and Duncan Fordney, bowling two of the Buford backs heels over head, while the flying Bowman bore down upon the waiting full-back who was between him and the distant goal post. Behind him thundered the men of both teams, but he was too far beyond them to be overtaken in a stern chase. Dodging like a frightened jack-rabbit, he eluded the flying tackle of the Buford full-back, and finished the thrilling dash

of sixty yards by scampering between the goal posts. A moment later the deft toe of "Len" Garretson tied the score.

"That's what they get for thinking the other fellow is crooked," said Captain McMurray as they formed to renew the contest.

"Perhaps they won't be so anxious to copper the next bet," replied "Len." "But you can't tell. Dick Stenton sure did wish a poison thought on those lads."

Whatever suspicions others might feel, young Cottrell, the Buford captain, who played a slashing game at tackle, proposed to take McMurray implicitly at his word. It was he who spoiled the first attempt at a forward pass and tore into a drive for a hole in the line before it could get under way. His men gained confidence, and when they recovered the ball on downs in mid-field, it began to advance in another series of the massed plunges, which were so terribly difficult for a much lighter team to obstruct. Slowly, inexorably, they pressed the defenders back. One of the bellicose young mountaineers was exiled from the game for earnestly endeavoring to knock the head off his particular foeman, but the substitute proved to be more active and less stupid.

Bruised, bleeding, and breathless, McMurray's clan reeled backward, hoping for a shift of luck. It was Cottrell who charged through like a buffalo and covered the last ten yards for the touch-down. The score became Buford 14; Somersworth 7.

And now McMurray uncovered a style of attack as facile and rapid as the manœuvres of light cavalry. It was incautious, hazardous, but so is every bold adventure which dices with fortune. He would bewilder and weary the heavy-footed enemy, give it no time to gather itself together.

"Forward pass! McMurray to Fordney!" he yelled, and the ball soared in a long flight, as accurately as a baseball catcher throws down to second. At full speed Fordney plucked it out of the air and ran twenty yards before he was hurled into the turf.

"Another forward pass. Let's all do it. Garretson to Gentry, and watch 'em try to muss it up!

"Lovely, boys! It makes 'em dizzy. First down, and we'll jam through left tackle for another gain.

"All promenade, and swing your partners. Here is the ball, Magoffin, old man. A fake kick and ramble around the right end, if you please. *Now!*

"Too bad! They really thought I told the truth that time. And another forward pass, McMurray down the field.

"Wow, I dropped it! Never mind. Punt it. Len. They can't keep it. A peach! Nailed in his tracks, by golly! Now wade in and take it away from Stenton's pets!"

In this manner did Somersworth romp down the field, literally playing a stronger eleven off its feet, giving it no respite, and dazing it with this singular fashion of proclaiming what was to happen next.

It was uncanny, unfamiliar, still menacing some cunning trickery or other. The next touch-down for Somersworth was scored when McMurray doubled and twisted and squirmed through a broken field and fell with the ball clasped to his stomach. An easy goal to kick and the struggle was even all, at fourteen points. At this it remained until the first half of the game was finished and there came a welcome breathing spell.

As Bowman McMurray walked to the side-line to slip on a sweater there rushed out to meet him an angular, brick-topped youth whose every freckle was illumined with affection. The McMurray emitted an insane yelp and clinched with the amazing apparition.

"Red Mercer, you whopper-jawed old snoozer, you! We thought you were dead or something. How come?"

"I came just now, Bo," replied the pilgrim from the Northern Presbyterian manse. "You knew I'd join The Lone Star Corporation if there was any way to fix it, so what was the sense of writing? Do you mind telling me what this is? Have you the nerve to call it a football game?"

"Len" Garretson loped up in time to answer:

"Look who's here! Little Cube-Root, the boy prodigal! Woof, woof, why didn't you make it in time to throw in with us coyotes? No, Red, this is not football. It is squat-tag."

"But I can't understand it at all," complained the logical offspring of the Reverend John Calvin Mercer.

"It puzzles us," sighed Bowman, "with the score horse and horse and two more periods to go. Don't try to guess it, Red. Sit down and enjoy it. You're barred from playing, for even a quick thinker like you can't get admitted to our high school before the referee's whistle blows."

"If I was the hero of a football story, it would be just in the nick of time to prance in and win the game," mourned John Calvin, Jr.

"Come on, Red," said Bowman, "you ornery old pirate, I want you to meet the team. I've got to say a few things to 'em, and I'll introduce you as the original, double-jointed mascot from good old Texas."

The merits of "Red" Mercer were familiar by hearsay. He was almost a legendary character. The very sight of him heartened the tired players who sat huddled in blankets. They were ready to fight on, but only a few of them expected to win. Henceforth it would be far more difficult to catch Buford napping by means of sheer audacity. Captain McMurray made no frenzied appeal to do or die. These were his brothers in a righteous cause and they had done their utmost. A few suggestions and he turned to ask "Red" Mercer:

"What do you s'pose Fayette Caldwell would do? He is really playing on this team to-day, though he doesn't know it."

"I can tell you one thing he would think of," modestly replied the minister's intellectual son, whose own idea it was. "You fellows are in honor

bound to call your plays and complete them accordingly. *But you don't have to start them in that way.* Do I make myself clear?"

"I get you!" eagerly exclaimed Bowman. "For instance, if I call for Garretson around the left end, he can do anything he likes so long as he actually tries to make his gain at left end."

"Why, certainly, Bo. It's absolutely on the level if he completes the play as announced. You can puzzle the other team and pull 'em over. Reverse your formations at the jump-off. You can try this on end plays, or a drive off tackle, or a punt or drop-kick. And they can't say you are not living up to your word."

"I reckon I was too honest," said the McMurray.

"Not at all," sharply retorted "Red" Mercer. "You were too thick. If more than one idea filters into your mind at once, it's standing-room only."

"The boy prodigal arrived in the nick of time, after all," solemnly declared the Garretson kid.

"A brilliant young fellow," said Bowman. "He will go far, unless he falls over his own feet."

Across the field Mr. Richard Stenton was vehemently laying down the law to his own men. They were sullen. The crowd was hostile and they felt it keenly. Public opinion condemned their coach as a shabby sportsman, and these high-spirited lads were compelled to share his disfavor. When a few excitable onlookers hissed Stenton during this interval, his players winced as though the insult was for them also. There had been no attempt to dis-

able the "Texas ringers" by rough tactics. Stenton's final orders had been otherwise. He perceived that the spectators were in no mood to tolerate any unfair play.

It was McMurray's hope that his eleven might score a decisive touch-down and then battle on the defensive, punting often and trusting to speed and luck. With "Red" Mercer's sage counsel in mind, he tried an experiment soon after the teams clashed again. His backs had been well drilled in a few deceptive formations. There was no need of a secret signal once they had grasped the idea. One half-back took the ball and swung off for the end, but before he could be tackled he shot the ball in a long lateral pass behind the line to the other half-back who darted for his end and was able to plunge through for an inspiring gain. And McMurray raised his voice to inform the foe:

"Didn't I tell you so? But you wouldn't believe it. Gentry was there on schedule, just like an express train."

The enemy was compelled to readjust its deductions. There was no disputing the fact that Somersworth had kept faith, but the manner of it was perplexing. Before they could collect their wits, the ball had been advanced until it was thirty yards from the goal posts.

Then McMurray shouted, in very deliberate accents:

"Now, Garretson, old man, show 'em a drop-kick

from Texas. Set your sights and remember the Rio Grande."

The lithe and limber full-back grinned in a placid manner and moved into position. Uneasy suspicions flitted through the minds of Dick Stenton's forwards. Would Garretson really attempt a drop-kick or would he feint and run with it? And would somebody else be tossing it about like playing basket-ball? The straining line swayed to and fro and a brawny Buford guard smashed through and fell over Bowman McMurray who was a very solid obstruction. The ball soared back fair and true and into "Len" Garretson's hands. He let it fall to the turf and his toe seemed merely to tick it. Unimpeded it rose and floated toward the bar of the tall goal posts. Then it descended in a lazy manner and came to earth. The verdict was expressed in the wild behavior of McMurray's men who danced like Indians.

Having won the lead, the thing was to hold it. The reckless McMurray now turned conservative. He had taken chances enough for one day. He would let Buford wear itself out in trying to batter the ball down the field by main strength. But this massive scoring machine had begun to crumble, to lose its cohesive power. Garretson punted, with the breeze to help him, and so compelled the opponents to launch their attack in mid-field or beyond. They fumbled or lost the ball on downs before they could surge within striking distance of the goal. The fighting spirit had diminished. The

moral equation was conquering them. They blamed not themselves, but their coach, which is a fatal attitude of mind.

Unable to score again, the game ended and Somersworth had won it by the margin of the Garretson kid's drop-kick. Without applause, denied the popular tribute vouchsafed the gallant in defeat, Dick Stenton's team dragged itself from the field. McMurray hastened after them and flung his arm across the shoulder of young Captain "Al" Cottrell, of Buford, who was digging his grimy knuckles into his eyes.

"It wasn't your fault at all!" cried Bowman. "You stand ace high with us, understand, old man? Will you please come to supper with me, at a little joint around the corner from the hotel?"

"I d-don't want to s-see anybody," faltered the boyish gladiator.

"Oh, yes, you do. We'll forget this old game an' talk about other things. For instance, where are you going to college?"

"I don't know. I haven't made any plans."

"I know," declared the McMurray. "You'll enter Old Centre next fall with me and Len Garretson and Red Mercer and Dunc Fordney. We have been very exclusive, but you belong, Cottrell—an' now there's five of us."

CHAPTER IX

"BO" IS DOOMED TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD

ALTHOUGH football may appear to be the theme of this chronicle, and a first down more important than a first prize in Latin, it would be unfair to the trio of heroes from Texas to accuse them of losing sight of all other ambitions. Many an older and wiser man will confide to you that his vocation interferes with the profoundly serious business of life, which may be golf or fishing or collecting rare books. After all, football runs its stormy course through a very brief season of the twelve-month, and the hardy survivors resume the tranquil pursuits of peace, like soldiers returned from the war.

So it was with the partners three of The Lone Star Corporation. Existence might be tinctured with anticlimax, but it was always interesting. They felt themselves to be at the threshold of college. Casting off his burden of responsibility as leader and warrior, Captain Bowman McMurray addressed himself to the intellectual demands of the senior year in school, resolved to tackle low and throw them hard. Meanwhile he would maintain the sartorial standards of Somersworth by ironing the wrinkles out of its foremost citizens.

The influence of John Calvin Mercer, Junior, alias "Red," was in the nature of a mental uplift.

He was a born student, with a genuine love of learning for its own sake, and stupidity in others annoyed him. Whenever he found his partners puzzling their slower wits over some problem or translation, he went to the rescue, for the sake of peace and quiet, and so drifted into the habit of acting as a guide and counsellor in things scholastic. With superb intentions, the other two were easily diverted and could not be called steady-gaited students for a long, hard pull.

They had vanquished the serious obstacles and the great adventure was no longer an experiment. There was no hardship in the kind of toil which they so blithely shared. It brought them to the last barrier, the college entrance examinations in June, which they scaled without coming a cropper. The dream had come true. They belonged to Old Centre. To Bowman McMurray it was the end of a long, long trail which had begun with a fighting fool of a boy in a blue denim shirt who had been compelled to lick three cops and watch a football game at the same time.

The three freshmen, for such they considered themselves to be, lingered in Danville for several days after finishing the examinations. It was a brief vacation before they went their different ways to work and save money through the summer, McMurray back to ride fence on the Dry Creek Ranch for old man Jaycox, the Garretson kid to the home place where he expected to convert his father to the doctrine of a college education, and

"Red" Mercer to drive a motor-truck for a grocer in Fort Hawley. They were not like strangers on the Centre campus, for they had visited it several times during the spring, usually as guests of that loyal old alumnus, Colonel Harris Shelby, who was delighted to convey them in his car from Somersworth. Through him they had made the acquaintance of many of the towns-people and the college faculty.

For a hundred years the town had felt it both a duty and a pleasure to take an affectionate interest in the young men who came to spend four years on the Centre campus. This meant that, for lack of dormitories, they had been welcomed as lodgers in the homes of the fine families of the old Blue-Grass stock. It was a traditional obligation, in a way, to have a student or two in the house. This was in the mind of Colonel Shelby who assured Bowman McMurray:

"Most of these Danville folks are kin of mine, or old friends and neighbors, and they'll be mighty glad to take you boys in. There's the Yerkes and Cecils and MacDowells and—"

"It will be splendid to have them as friends, Colonel," explained the McMurray, "but you know how it is with Len and Red and me, *just like this*. We have sort of signed up to stick together till death do us part. The Lone Star Corporation may have to keep on pressin' pants for an education. We're kind of tired of that, but, anyhow, we'd be liable to disturb an old Kentucky home."

"Why don't you show some good sense, Bo, and let me lend you boys some money? You are smart enough to clean it up after you get quit of college. This fiddlin' around at odd jobs will interfere with more impo'tant things."

"It was decided by a vote of the partners to incur no liabilities, Colonel. Easy credit is what wrecks a lot of corporations. It's only through the football season that we'll feel jammed for time, and Red and I expect to get pretty good pay in the summer. I'll have to watch old Red and be severe with him. He never did cut loose from home before nor had any money of his own. That boy would ruin himself on candy and ice-cream and picture shows if I gave him his head, Colonel. You know how it is—sowin' wild oats. Red is passin' through one of those naturally dissipated streaks."

"Is it as bad as that?" exclaimed the Colonel, in horrified accents. "Leadin' a double life, and his name is John Calvin Mercer, Junior! Can anything be done to save him?"

Nothing pleased the McMurray more than to play up to such a melodramatic cue as this, and he answered, without a smile:

"The noble influence of a pure woman, Colonel, is the one best bet. Red will prob'ly see much of her this summer, darn him. Her folks buy their groceries from the store he expects to drive a truck for. I shall explain to Miss Overton just what Red's fatal weakness is. She will join hands with us in saving him from himself."

"The miserable young spendthrift, gallopin' straight for perdition," lamented Colonel Harris Shelby. "The Centre College football team needs him, Bo. I am reliably info'med that he will be a red-headed hellion in the rush-line."

"He's good, Colonel. You seem interested in football?"

"It is more than a sport, son. That Buford game convinced me of that. Anything has my blessing that revives the spirt of chivalry in this sordid, money-grabbin' age. That's why I yelled myself into an attack of bronchitis when you clipped Dick Stenton's spurs and sent him home in disgrace. Look out for him, Bo. He won't forget it. I have the highest regard for the Stentons of Buford, but this boy is the black sheep. And he will nurse a grudge. Seems like he throws back to some strain of bad mountain blood."

"He can't start any mountain feud with me," declared McMurray. "That would be a fine thing to hand down to my own sons! The easiest way would be to transfer it to Len Garretson. His father was a Texas Ranger years ago, an' it's a kind of proverb around where they live that the quickest way to enjoy poor health is to pester one of those peaceful Garretsons. I tried it once, Colonel."

Colonel Harris Shelby, his own undaunted youth recalled from the mists of memory, found it congenial to loiter through a long June day with these boyish friends of his and convey to their eager imaginations a sense of the intangible values of this

little college in the heart of the Blue Grass. The campus appeared very much as he had first known it, spacious and leafy and dignified, a park which ennobled the city that had spread around it. In the background stood the low, gray hall with the pillared front which had first cradled this seat of learning and was fitly called the "Old College Home."

In vivid bits of narrative, an episode, the mention of this Kentucky pioneer or that, the Colonel made them see the wonderful panorama of the settlement of this region of unbroken forest, the migration of intelligent and godly people who toiled over the mountains during the Revolutionary War and after, in the wake of Daniel Boone and the other fighting adventurers, and erected from the very elements of social life an organized commonwealth. They believed in education and were ready to make sacrifices to attain it for their children.

It happened, therefore, that as early as 1820 this Centre College was founded in a very modest way, on the wagon trail which Daniel Boone had laid out to open the rolling lands of Kentucky to the hardy settlers from the States to the eastward. Danville could not help growing into one of the substantial towns of this Blue-Grass country, which, once cleared of its dense woodland, was the richest and kindliest soil that ever the plough of a pioneer turned in a furrow.

Through one generation after another, the college lived and was more deeply rooted among its own people, nor was it ever ashamed to proclaim

itself a Christian college. Many a larger institution has been careful to rid itself of the hall-mark of Christianity, as though the idea that its spirit and teachings should have anything to do with education was a quaint, old-fashioned dogma. Centre College preferred to be out-of-date in this respect. And it did not seem to reap disfavor in the opinion of those qualified to appraise the intellectual merits of such a place as this. There was neither cant nor affectation in the atmosphere of the campus. Religion was not taught in the classrooms or ding-donged from the chapel platform. The students were as happy-go-lucky and some of them as cheerfully godless as the types familiar to other academic shades.

Call it a tradition, an influence, whatever you please, it seemed to be taken for granted at Centre College that Christianity could be a living faith and not a dead creed. There it was, at any rate, a heritage from devout forefathers who had fought the good fight, and the boys could take it or leave it. Of its small faculty, most of the professors had served and taught for many years, contented to be teachers and not research specialists and degree-hunters. They thought it more important to interest and stimulate the mind of a boy than to write monographs which nobody reads.

Such methods and ideals might be scorned by a real up-to-date American university as obsolete, but somehow the little Blue-Grass college continued to turn out men who attained distinction for learning

and character. It had aspired to no great fame in athletics, lacking both numbers and financial resources. Its roll of students would not have made a football squad for any of the colleges which are noted for prowess of this sort. The team met and performed honorably against its natural rivals, but was usually beaten when it was rash enough to compete with state universities and the like, with the students numbered by thousands.

While all this may seem to be digressing, it is interwoven with the fortunes of Bowman McMurray and his fellow Texans. They hoped to do great things for Centre College, and now they began to be aware of what the college might do for them. Even during this brief preliminary visit in June, they ceased to think of the campus in terms of football. It was something more to them than a tournament field on which they would ride with vizors down and lances couched against whatever foe might accept combat.

Because, at eighteen, they were more toughly seasoned than freshman might be expected to be, they were also more observant, more sensitive to real values. It was not easy to fool them with shoddy stuff. They were simply and sincerely anxious to be educated men and gentlemen in the true sense of the words. It was while they were perched in a row at a lunch counter of Danville that McMurray remarked, after due reflection:

"To think I spent an hour ramblin' around with a Greek professor this afternoon, and liked it!

Pop Black, they call the old boy, and he's been right here on the job for thirty-six years. And he is just as human as old man Jaycox! We figured it out that if Achilles and Hector had known a few football formations, the war would have got on a sight faster."

"I came near forgetting to go inspect the gymnasium again," confessed Garretson. "I happened to hook up with the president of the college and we discussed various things—about what you go to a place like this for, and how much it ought to cost us, and why study Latin."

"You wouldn't be able to hook up with the president of Harvard in that casual manner," observed "Red" Mercer. "How many students do they expect to have in the fall?"

"A few more than usual. Maybe a hundred and thirty. And I don't savvy how Old Centre will grow much unless we can put it on the map with a real football team."

"I feel just that way, Len," fervently exclaimed McMurray.

This was a new ambition, the glimpse of a vision in which self-seeking was eclipsed. They carried it with them when they went away from Danville for the summer. Bowman McMurray steered like a homing pigeon for Fort Hawley and a reunion with his brawny father and sweet-souled mother and all the adoring little McMurrays. It desolated them to find that he could tarry only a few days before he proceeded to report to old man Jaycox

and his pay-roll. Anxiously the mother yearned to know what was in the heart of this manly son of hers, and she ventured to ask him, with a wistful intonation:

"Those pretty Kentucky girls, now, Bowman,—the Blue-Grass belles that I have heard so much talk about,—how many of them fell heels over head in love with you?"

"Oh, I lost count after the first month," laughed the hero. "Red Mercer was the lady-killer of the outfit. I mean that. He stepped on them at every dance. I didn't get married secretly or anything. Nary a flutter. So that's off your mind."

"You're the lad to choose the one girl and it will come hard when you find her," sighed the fond mother. "I used to think—but never mind that—you are so big that you will be telling me it's none of my affair."

"It's the same girl," said Bowman, his gaze very frank. "And I s'pose I'll always take it hard because I can't get her. I must go to see Fayette Caldwell to-night, but—but I reckon I'll drop in at the Overtons' first."

"And there is no call for me to remind you of your manners or your temper," declared Mrs. McMurray.

Again, and after long separation, Bowman waited in the Overton parlor for Nancy to descend the staircase. He was in a mood to display his deeper feelings, to permit Nan to perceive that she was something more than an old schoolmate to him.

In short, it was just as well to let her know that he was no longer a woman-hater. While he was thus bemused, Nancy tripped in so lightly that she caught him gazing at himself in a long mirror, his stocky figure drawn to its full height, a frown upon his manly brow, the pose suggesting the inflexible determination of a young man prepared to conquer the world for the sake of the woman he loved and to lay its trophies at her feet. Nancy was interested, but she quite missed the point.

"Why, Bowman, how do you do? Having a quarrel with yourself for lack of somebody to fight with?"

This was an unfortunate greeting. It nettled a young man who had outgrown childish things, besides reminding him of an occasion when he had, indeed, found somebody to fight with. Add to this the discomforture of being caught making faces in a mirror, and it will be inferred that the McMurray was not himself. One glance told him that Nancy certainly did improve with age. She was divinely tall, he said to himself, but he hoped she wouldn't grow any more. A man's wife ought not to be able to look down on him.

These fleeting impressions were more or less subconscious. The infatuated McMurray's emotions, as visibly expressed, suggested chagrin and injury that he should be so misunderstood.

"I quit fighting years ago, Nan," said he; "but it seems hard for a man to live down the follies of youth an' so forth. To be reminded of such things

when a man is in college seems—well, it seems unfortunate, to say the least."

Nancy Overton was properly chastened and offered a feeling apology, but it was never possible for her to take Bowman as seriously as he deserved. A swift appraisal told her that his rough edges had been smoothed and he had acquired other things than those to be found in textbooks. He was so admirable that Nancy felt it a duty to lend a helping hand in this process of education. With feminine tact she therefore guided the conversation until it was opportune to say:

"I heard all about your football record at Somersworth, of course, from Fayette Caldwell mostly. He was very proud of you and the other boys from Texas. But now you are in college, Bowman, I'm sure you will realize that other interests are much more important than being a great football player."

To the sensitive McMurray the rebuke seemed unfair, for he was still in a ruffled mood. Fresh from the visit to the Centre College campus, he dwelt in a sort of afterglow of enthusiasm and idealism, but as he sadly said to himself, Nancy was unable to understand him. She was blind to the deeper things in his nature.

"I expect to play football," said he, in aggressive tones, "and it's important to do it as well as you know how. That's true of everything. But the friends I've already made at Old Centre would please you, I reckon. For instance, the professor of the Greek Language and Literature!"

This was a bit too much for Nancy. It took her by surprise. Her eyes were dancing and her smile was a shade too mirthful. She simply couldn't help it. Bowman glowered. So it was ridiculous, was it, for him to try to mix with real intellectual people? Nan Overton couldn't even realize that it took brains to play good football.

"The professor of Greek?" reverently echoed Nancy. "Have you any more playmates like that? Please forgive me, Bo. I didn't mean to lecture you."

"Women are so much finer than us rough, simple men that I s'pose they have a right to," handsomely admitted the McMurray. "But I hoped to find a sort of unspoken sympathy in you, Nan—intuition, that's the word—so I wouldn't have to explain myself."

"It is here, Bowman," exclaimed the girl, her hand against her heart, but he mistrusted the way she said it, and the golden opportunity was lost by default.

And now they steered into troubled waters, quite unexpectedly, when Nancy remarked:

"Red Mercer wrote me a long letter about your game with that horrid team from Buford. He was terribly disappointed that he was too late to play."

"Yes, we certainly did miss reliable old Red, but we managed to win the game without him."

This was a most unlucky speech nor did Bowman mean to put it precisely in that way, but perhaps he was guilty nevertheless. He may have fallen

into the habit of taking it too much for granted that his own ability and leadership were paramount. He would not have dreamed of disloyalty and the suggestion of it would have shocked him beyond words. Nancy Overton scrutinized him anxiously. The very suspicion that she might have found a flaw in him seemed to mean a great deal to her. When she spoke, it was almost pleadingly.

"You managed to win the game without him, Bowman? Do you want me to believe that? Red wasn't boasting about it. He isn't that kind. But he told me how he had reached Somersworth just in time to run all the way to the field and see the last half of the game. And you had decided to play it without any signals, as the honorable thing to do, and the score was tied and your team felt discouraged. All Red Mercer said about himself was that he had an idea and he explained it to you, and it helped you to rush Buford off its feet and let Len Garretson kick a goal from the field and win the game. So I don't think you really did manage to win that game without John Calvin Mercer, Junior."

To Bowman McMurray the accusation was like the touch of a red-hot iron. It charged him with infidelity toward that brotherhood whose sacred motto was "*Just like this.*" A wave of angry color swept from his chin to the roots of his hair and he jumped to his feet to walk the floor. He groped for something to say and bit his quivering lip. The sense of injustice was overwhelming. That Nan

Overton should so twist a harmless remark to mean something very different! Much distressed, she waited in silence until he paused in front of her to exclaim:

"Listen, Nan! Is that your honest opinion of me? There must be something more to it than what I said just now. That wasn't enough to make you go and delib'rately break my heart. All in the world I said was that we won the Buford game, even if Red Mercer couldn't play on the team. Wasn't it true? And you sit there and tell me that I robbed him of the credit of it, to pin bouquets on myself! Why, I couldn't be more s'prised if the roof had tumbled in on us. And to hear a thing like that from the girl I have worshiped from afar, for years and years—"

The McMurray shook his head and walked across the room.

Courageously Nancy explained:

"Something that Fayette Caldwell said a while ago gave me the same impression, Bowman. You have been writing to him all through the year, and I don't have to tell you how pleased he was with your splendid record. But he had the idea that you kind of overlooked Red Mercer's help in that Buford game. I don't know how he got it into his head."

"I have been off on the wrong slant, then? Too much Bowman McMurray? He is the whole show?" cried the wretched young man, and this was something like a confession. "I never intended

to have it that way, Nan. You will believe me, won't you?"

"I do, absolutely, Bo. You have done so much in the last three years that it's natural, perhaps, for you to take it too seriously sometimes. It makes me awfully unhappy to mention it, you can see that. But it just happened to come up between us to-night, and—and we are old friends, and I want to like you just as much as ever."

Bowman actually smiled. There was room for hope that he might ultimately recover from the shock. He was subdued and frightened, however, and the feeling was akin to that which he had experienced when "Len" Garretson had pulled him out of the Rio Grande. In more than one way it had been granted to Bowman to behold himself in a mirror.

"Thank you, Nan," said he. "As for liking me as much as ever, I don't see how you can. But the quality of mercy is not strained, tho' I don't see how it could help being strained, as far as you are concerned."

"Let's forget it, Bo," replied Nancy, with the old twinkle. "All great men have their failings."

Bowman said good-night shortly after this, leaving many things unsaid. The occasion had not been propitious for announcing that he was no longer a woman-hater.

CHAPTER X

"IT LOOKS LIKE I DISGRACED MYSELF"

THROUGH the summer the hurt inflicted by Nancy Overton was like an unhealed scar. It cut deeper than a misunderstanding, for truth had sharpened its edge. Unwittingly he had committed the sin of ingratitude against a friend, and the reason was that he had come to think of himself as the great "Bo" McMurray! Pride had tripped him.

When the partners three mobilized in September for the joyous journey to Kentucky, Bowman was mightily resolved that never again would he offend in this wise. "Red" Mercer had no knowledge of the disturbance which he had innocently caused. He had enjoyed his summer's work, which consisted mostly of delivering groceries at the back door of the Overton mansion, to hear him tell it, and Bowman grimly listened to the prattle and accepted it as part of his punishment. When it came to announcing his grand passion, there was nothing reticent about John Calvin Mercer, Junior. He amused that cool and wary young cow-puncher, "Len" Garretson, who kept his emotions to himself and saw fit to comment:

"He listens to me like a nuisance, Bo. Do we have to live with him? Who ever thought a hard-shell Presbyterian would turn mushy? There may

be a woman somewheres that's feeble-minded enough to love this speckled old skeesicks, but he hasn't backed up to the right place with his groceries yet."

"Jealous and mean, both of you," blithely retorted "Red." "A girl who is as intellectual as she is beautiful gets awful tired of a pair of boneheads who can talk nothing but football and beef cattle. Art and music and literature find me responsive."

"That angel of a girl would be kind to you, naturally," drawled Garretson. "She is too tenderhearted to show her real feelings."

The McMurray laughed a somewhat hollow laugh and adroitly changed the subject.

"If this poor old locoed Mercer will stop raving, I'll tell you some real news. Fayette Caldwell is coming to Centre College to coach the team this fall. He can't stay the whole season, but he'll be there for the important games, six weeks, anyhow. He told me yesterday. He can afford to leave his office that long, with a law partner to keep her moving. The college coaxed him into it."

This was prodigious tidings, indeed! They really did not know whether Caldwell was a great coach or not, but his personality inspired in them the most implicit confidence. And they had discovered that his influence survived on the campus, in its social life as well as its athletics. He was one of the younger graduates who had left a clear-cut imprint.

Bowman McMurray went on to say:

"I went over the situation with him. With us

three fellows, and Duncan Fordney from Somersworth, and Al Cottrell, the Buford captain, it looks like something to build up with."

" 'Specially Bo McMurray," observed John Calvin Mercer, Junior, with the utmost sincerity.

The peerless leader winced and blushed. The scar had not yet healed. Hastily he exclaimed:

"This will be no one-man team, Red, so cut that out. I don't like it."

"Since when?" mildly queried the minister's son. "This imitation of the shy and shrinking violet is new to us. Elucidate."

"Have I been chesty? Have you honestly noticed anything like that? What about it, Len?"

"It never worried me, Bo. You'll always want to boss any outfit you tie up to. And so far you've earned the right. Nobody ever handed you anything on a silver platter, and a man that has to fight for what he gets is apt to dislike bein' a low card."

"But you licked me once, Len. Have I ever tried to boss you since then?"

"What put such fool notions in your head?" curtly demanded Garretson.

"Oh, nothing much," muttered McMurray. "Red was trying to get a rise out of me. Maybe it was all in fun, but if you fellows have the slightest idea—"

"Bat him in the eye, Red," suggested the bored Garretson kid. "One of those sentimental fits is coming on. You know. Motion-picture stuff. The title of this one is 'Dear Old College Pals.' "

Bowman grinned and concluded to air no more

grievances, but he pondered in silence and was sorely perplexed. He could never be down-hearted for long, however, and apparently his comrades bore him no ill-will, but his determination was strengthened to give them no more chances to hint that he was working for his own glory.

No sooner had they found rooms together in Danville and learned the routine of the college programme than every afternoon saw them trotting from the gymnasium to the football field. It was a small squad, no more than thirty men of any promise, and the high hopes of the Texans were dampened. But the fact that Fayette Caldwell was coming to take charge sufficed to ward off discouragement. McMurray soon recovered that honest joy in fighting against odds and stubbornly clung to the doctrine that it took only eleven men to make a team. And there were five freshmen, tried and true, veterans of hard-fought fields, who were bound together by ties of friendship and confidence. This was the brighter side of the picture.

Now the spirit of the crowd is a thing subtle and potent for good or ill, whether it be on a campus or in a regiment or a battleship. A new feeling stirred in Old Centre College. It pervaded the students and the faculty, it was felt among the alumni of the town, and it was carried to the surrounding region of the Blue-Grass country. It flowed from this group of splendid athletes, five of them, who played football with the fiery zeal of Crusaders faring forth to Palestine.

After a fortnight or so other volunteers joined the squad, a few of them men of excellent physique and ready minds, until almost half the college was reporting for practice. There were old players living in Danville to organize a coaching staff and carry the work along until Fayette Caldwell's arrival, but much of the responsibility rested upon the captain of the team, an upper-classman who played quarter-back. He had given a good account of himself through two seasons and was one of the most influential men on the campus, of solid worth in every way. Unfortunately for him, he regarded football as a sport and not as a holy crusade against the paynims of the outer world.

It is therefore obvious that young Bowman McMurray, a lowly freshman but a football genius, was an awkward problem for Captain Perley Kemp. The Texan had forgotten more football than the captain ever knew. One phase of the situation was soon adjusted. The captain shifted to another position behind the line and put McMurray in his stead at quarter-back. It was the only thing to do and the college warmly approved. This was no high-school team, however, and there was not the slightest intention of turning it over to the captaincy of the extraordinary freshman from Texas. He might have more ability than the rest of them, but in the social order of the campus it was proper that he should serve and await promotion.

Now this Centre College captain, Perley Kemp, was a steady, dependable athlete who played foot-

ball rather from a sense of duty than because he loved it. He was powerfully built and doggedly courageous. As a quarter-back he had displayed sound judgment, but none of that audacious initiative which picks up a weary, beaten team and fairly hurls it to victory. As for the strategy and tactics of the game, he was more interested in his college courses. Let the coaches use their minds all they liked, and he would execute the plan of campaign, faithfully, obediently.

There was no training-table, but Bowman McMurray, who could not help organizing something, started a small eating-club in one of the old college buildings, with his four freshman comrades of the brotherhood as charter members. Other members of the football squad soon joined them, and the quaint room with the wide stone fireplace became the meeting-place of a dozen congenial spirits. They talked football, of course, at meals and when they lingered after supper before scattering to their rooms.

Standing at a blackboard, Bowman McMurray would explain the doctrines of the game as Fayette Caldwell had drilled them into him. And the shrewd, active intellect of John Calvin Mercer, Junior, suggested variations, original touches of his own. Chalk in hand he was like an instructor in mathematics. Behind all this mental exercise was the fundamental idea that the game had entered a new era in which speed and versatility and quick thinking were the essentials. The small college,

which was unable to measure its football material by the ton, was offered opportunities previously denied it.

After a time the three or four alumni who were doing the preliminary coaching, and the captain of the team, began to drop in after supper for the discussions of McMurray's eating-club. It was a clearing-house for ideas, and it fostered a spirit of comradeship in the common cause. When these older men happened to join the group, Bowman endeavored to keep in the background, to maintain a respectful silence, but sooner or later some point was raised which set him going in spite of himself. It is always difficult for the artist to refrain from talking shop when he knows more about it than the rest of the company.

This caused no serious friction at the eating-club, but in the daily practice at the field there was discerned on the horizon a cloud considerably bigger than a man's hand. The McMurray had been a leader, and a successful one, too long to trail as a private in the rear rank. It was not that he sought the centre of the stage or wilfully ignored the tenets of discipline and authority. He was the man best qualified to lead the team and this tendency flared up in spite of him.

One of the volunteer coaches, a young banker of Danville, asked the captain to dine at his house and they considered the troublesome case of McMurray. They had the kindliest feeling for him. It amounted to admiration, but as the coach expressed it:

"We can't let him romp away with it, Perley. And yet he'll shy like a colt and turn fractious if you twist him too hard. He is a freshman in the classroom, but he has none of the ear-marks when you get him outside. That's the trouble. It's ridiculous to handle him like one of these callow boys just fluttering out from home."

"We could let him get away with it this year," replied Captain Perley Kemp, "and I haven't a doubt that we can turn out one smashing good team that will come pretty near cleaning up. But what about next season, and after that? This is the greatest chance that Centre College ever had to build up real football."

"I understand," said the coach, "but five men don't make an eleven. What we want is a system, not a flash in the pan for a season or so. And you simply cannot make it solid and secure without obedience and discipline. Confound it, this is not solitaire."

"I have spoken to McMurray on the field, several times," rather gloomily declared the captain. "I took him aside, of course, and wasn't in the least rough about it. He was terribly hurt and penitent, and boiling over with apologies. He never meant to ignore my orders, and all that, and it won't happen again, so help him."

"And he forgot all about it, Perley, and took charge of the team, head down and heels up, eh? My experience is about the same as yours."

It was difficult to come to any decision. To

adopt severe measures might cause the other Texans to fly to arms. It had not escaped notice that in a critical moment of hard practice with the second eleven, they had a trick of holding up their fingers, close together, and shouting at each other, "*Just like this!*" It was like the battle-cry of a Highland clan.

"We'll rock along as well as we can, Perley, until Fayette Caldwell takes hold of things. He has known this high-stepping McMurray ever since he was a pup, and really shoved him along for Centre College. And McMurray thinks Caldwell is the source of all human wisdom."

"I expected to fetch up about like this," smiled the captain. "Well, we play our first game tomorrow, and it ought to be easy. Say what you like, this team of ours is a bunch of bear-cats. They play clean, but the idea that they can be licked has never entered their heads. I couldn't put that spirit into them. We'll have to hand it to McMurray and his pals."

"So say we all," granted the coach; "but unless he is harness-broke, he is liable to ditch the wagon."

The game next day with the Transylvania College eleven from Lexington was in the nature of a test of this new dispensation. In other years it would not have been considered a light ordeal. A Centre victory had been an occasion for rejoicing. That this was different may be inferred from the remark of a strapping Transylvania guard quite early in the contest:

"Little Old Centre may call itself a Christian college, but it plays like hell."

This was a compact summary. It was not a finished team, but it made the other eleven yearn for the finish. One touch-down after another rolled up thirty-four points for Centre which kept its own goal line clear of invasion. The McMurray was never more spectacular, dodging and sprinting for long runs that inspired frantic roars of applause, or tackling like a shock-headed demon. With "Red" Mercer as a roving centre-rush who crashed into it where the enemy least expected him, McMurray was at the top of his form. They knew how to work together. And "Len" Garretson completed a trio which had learned almost to think as one.

Thrown to the winds were Bowman's intentions of deferring to the captain of the team. He merely forgot all about it, although when he had trotted out of the gymnasium he was devoutly recalling the cruel but deserved indictment of Nancy Overton. Her name was on his lips, as he might have said. A few minutes later he was the warrior bold, the leader of men, and there was no room for another thought in his head. *To win*, that was the dominant, all-absorbing passion. He was playing his first game for good Old Centre College.

There was no clash of authority until Captain Perley Kemp called his men together between scrimmages and began to tell them what should be done to tighten up the line against the Transylvania offensive. The McMurray was absently caressing a

scratch on his nose and paying no attention whatever. Coming out of his trance, he elbowed the captain aside and briskly exclaimed:

"I've got it, boys! Now, shut up and listen, Perley, old man. We don't propose to let those birds score on us, do we? A drop-kick is all we're afraid of. You play up closer, Perley, and put some of the old tabasco into it. You're the only man that's dead on his feet and—"

"Len" Garretson grasped the voluble McMurray by the neck and choked him into silence.

"Quit the chatter, Bo. For the love of Mike, where do you think you are? On the Fort Hawley grammar-school lot? First thing you know, this football team will be getting along without you."

Bowman looked foolish and then more unhappy than angry. It was like dashing cold water in his face. He stammered an apology:

"I—I forgot. Will you f-forgive me, Captain Perley Kemp? It's tragic, I tell you, to—to be so interested in a football game that you forget who you are."

With a sort of fatherly feeling, honest Perley Kemp postponed the argument and resumed his interrupted discourse. He was seriously disturbed. He would call the coaches into conference after supper and present an ultimatum as captain of the Centre College eleven. As usual, however, luck was kind to McMurray. In the last few minutes of the game he sprained his ankle and was carried from the field, and thence to his room in a motor-

car. The doctor said that he would be on crutches for several days and could not safely play within a fortnight. This intervention of Providence persuaded Captain Perley Kemp that he could safely delay action until the arrival of Fayette Caldwell.

McMurray was pathetically repentant. When he was down-hearted, he sounded the depths and his partners felt so sorry for him that it seemed like needless punishment to add their own criticisms of his conduct. Moreover, it ill accorded with their code to torment a cripple. And as the Garretson kid summed it up in a long conversation with John Calvin Mercer, Junior:

"He won't stand even a whisper from us, Red. Remember how he rattled his horns when we were coming up from Texas and you hinted that young Mr. McMurray was shy some of the violet's traits, such as hiding its light under a bushel?"

"You mix your botany and Scripture most fearfully," chided the minister's son, "but I agree with you about Bo. Would it do any good if you were to lick him? Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

"It would do me no good to try, Red. That boy has been piling on weight and muscle for three years while I just spindle taller. I couldn't even push him over. What gets into him?"

"An obsession, Len."

"Then he ought to be operated on it while this sprain lays him off. You don't mean an abscess, do you?"

"Nothing as serious as that. He is too intense. You don't know what that means either. You are just about as emotional as a flap-jack."

"Huh, you don't know me, Red. I suffer in silence. Strong men generally do. Why, the night you pranced into Miss Nan Overton's house with that infernal little chess-box under your arm and broke up my private session, I sat and uttered stifled moans an' never shrieked once."

Fayette Caldwell appeared on the campus a few days earlier than expected and lost no time in acquainting himself with the football situation. The quiet demeanor and low voice of this slender, dark-eyed young lawyer did not accord with the accepted portrait of an athletic coach. It was worth noting, however, that the members of the college family, from white-haired professors to the darky who raked the leaves on the campus, welcomed him like a son returned to the fold. And the number of elderly ladies of Danville who expected him to call on them was astonishing.

The captain and his advisers displayed an enthusiasm in which the one slight flaw was the exuberance of that great freshman, " Bo " McMurray. Caldwell promised to try his hand at taming his young Texan and refused to be alarmed. In fact, it appeared to amuse him. He knew that Bowman himself would be only too anxious to confess his sins at the first opportunity. Caldwell met him on the campus, just after a recitation hour, and they sauntered to a bench among the spreading

trees. The sprained ankle was so nearly well that Bowman expected to rejoin the eleven in another day or two.

"Look here, son, I hear you sort of ran wild in the Transylvania game," said the guardian of morals and manners. "You always used to mind what I told you."

"And I'll do it again, Mr. Caldwell," blurted Bowman, his mien very sorrowful. "Just try me. Yes, it looks like I disgraced myself right here at Old Centre College. You would think I had more sense—now wouldn't you? Here I am, older than I used to be, as the years pass by, an' yet I behave like a born fool. You might think it was educated out of me by this time."

"Don't ask too much of education, Bo. Unless you can learn to take orders you will never be fit to command. If it wasn't for the mental and moral discipline in football, I wouldn't coach a team five minutes. Get into your head the gospel of teamwork and college will have taught you something better than books. The game is bigger than the man that plays it, if the game is worth while."

"Yes, Mr. Caldwell," earnestly agreed the remorseful McMurray. "What got me into this snarl was that I knew more football than the whole outfit, and I couldn't help telling 'em. Now that you are on the job, it's different. Why, if you decided to fire me off the team to-morrow, I'd know for certain that it was for the best interests of Centre College football."

"I believe you would, Bo," Caldwell replied, "but you haven't got the right slant on it yet. And I am not quite sure that you can find it in freshman year. It is a thing of the spirit; not religion, but akin to it."

"I know who has it!" cried Bowman McMurray. "Old Colonel Harris Shelby, of Somersworth. It shines in his face when he talks about his Lost Cause."

"The cause! You have hit it, Bo. That is what you must be loyal to. The men don't count. Just now your cause is Centre College football. It will be something else some day."

CHAPTER XI

ANDY SWOPE ENCOUNTERS A TEMPERAMENT

FOOTBALL was, after all, only one of many currents in the main stream of the college life which flowed on through these weeks of autumn. There were other rivalries no less important to those engaged in them. Youthful orators of the literary societies faced each other in debates which sonorously grappled with the vital questions of the hour. The fraternities conducted their campaigns for likely recruits and displayed a high order of diplomacy and practical politics. Freshmen and sophomores met on the war-path, as is the immemorial tradition of the American campus, and fought an annual battle called "The Flag Rush." The average number of young men fell madly in love with the average number of carefully guarded rosebuds of the Kentucky College for Women on the other side of the town.

Hard students toiled for prizes and high marks, and genial loafers played poker and burned gasoline on the turnpikes instead of midnight oil at the study desk. Devoted professors toiled to implant certain conceptions of culture and learning and hoped that a little of it might stick. Daily the whole college assembled for brief chapel exercises. It was compulsory, but these young men actually

enjoyed themselves. When they sang a hymn, it was like a big glee club. And the little talk by the manly, upstanding president, or one of the faculty, was right from the shoulder, the old, simple gospel of duty and right living and the Golden Rule. And these boys listened. They were willing to grant that chapel wasn't a nuisance. They would have been unwilling to abolish it.

Perhaps Fayette Caldwell had learned something from this daily convocation which he had attended through four years. It may have helped him to become the kind of man that Centre College was proud of. At any rate, he was convinced that true sportsmanship and the Golden Rule could never be far apart. His three young Texans had brought it with them, as a result of his teaching, and it was already working to leaven the whole football squad. His task was made easier for him.

As he had foreseen, Bowman McMurray showed not the slightest symptoms of upsetting law and order. He was like a faithful collie which had been waiting to hear its master's voice. Now and again, in the heat and stress of the game, he may have found it hard to restrain the habit and instinct of command, but a glance at Fayette Caldwell crouching on the side-line, and the McMurray grinned and held his peace. As a quarter-back he handled the team with singular ability, but he had ceased to feel that he was the commanding general or the chief of staff.

It was intensely interesting to watch the develop-

ment of this dashing eleven which was creating a new tradition for Centre College. There were weak places in it, and at least another season would be required to bring it to the ultimate degree of strength and smoothness. But the stuff was in it and the quality of the coaching could make or mar it. As the season advanced, Caldwell was astonished at his own success, but he gave most of the credit to the men who played the game as he told them to. He found it unnecessary to bully and frighten them. He advised and suggested and they accepted every word as a mandate. This was the sort of grip he held on these eager, high-strung young athletes. It was the way they handled good horses in the Blue-Grass country.

The brightest hopes were more than realized when Centre College met and defeated by a small score the University of Indiana. It was a terrier tackling a mastiff. The Hoosiers had included the minor Kentucky team in its schedule for the sake of practice, a preliminary to the contests of real importance. The only persons who seemed not at all astonished were the helmeted, battered crusaders from little Old Centre. The McMurray, who had never known defeat, had instilled it into the hearts of his comrades that there was no such thing.

"It's a mental attitude," he glibly assured them. "Faith and works are the trump cards. Of course, you have to be there with the works. I don't have to tell you. But you keep your ears open in chapel and you'll learn a lot to help you in football."

Shortly after this Indiana game, Caldwell wrote a letter to an old friend, and part of it read:

DEAR ANDY:

I have just happened to hear that you have thrown up your coaching contract in Alabama. You have probably heard that we have a real football team here. I am giving some time to it, but I doubt whether I can carry it on next season. From the present outlook, with the great increase of interest in Centre football, the college can afford to engage a coach and pay him a decent salary. This is what ought to be done. My law practice ties me to Fort Hawley and I can only run up to Danville now and then as a vacation.

Can't you come and spend the rest of this season with the team and get in touch with the situation? The idea is that you shall take over the coaching, with an agreement covering a term of years. I have talked it over with the president and with the Danville graduates. They agree with me that you are the one man who can fill the job. It is an unusual opportunity, as you will discover for yourself. You are an old Blue-Grass boy and you know the college and what it has always stood for.

This letter reached Mr. "Andy" Swope while he was out with gun and dogs on a Georgia plantation. That he was a man of quick decision will be deduced from the fact that during part of the year he was a baseball umpire in the National League. He sent a telegram to Danville and followed it by the next through train. A rugged man was Andy Swope who seldom used language to conceal his thoughts. As a professional umpire he was respected for the enemies he made. Of a very

different mould from Fayette Caldwell, they had the same code of sportsmanship, and they thought football was the finest game in the world. Andy Swope was the elder by several years, a man who had endured the world's hard knocks. Experience had mellowed him, as Caldwell knew, and his integrity was unswerving.

"There's no excuse for letting college athletics get smirched up, Fayette," said he. "If they can't be kept clean, they had better be wiped out."

"All clean here, Andy. You know Dick Stenton of Buford. He made a fuss over what he called 'the Texas ringers' when my boys were at Somersworth. Those rustlers *broke* into college. You couldn't keep them out."

"Dick Stenton?" snorted the umpire. "I heard he coached the high-school team to make a bluff at being respectable in his own town. But they don't know what a hard citizen this boy has turned out to be. I crossed his trail last summer. Wine and women, cards and horses, he plays 'em across the board. They'll throw him before long. Even a Stenton bank-roll can't stand it. Of course your players are all straight, Fayette. Why waste your breath? Let's give them the once-over."

They turned in the direction of the old college building which sheltered Bowman McMurray's eating-club. It was the leisure hour after supper and several of the team were lounging in front of the log fire. They shook hands with the hard-featured, wiry visitor who was as weather-beaten

as a sailor. As a Big League umpire he was a sensation, as a football coach he was subject to scrutiny. They would reserve judgment. Caldwell's endorsement would go a long way. He told them of his hope that Mr. Swope might be persuaded to organize Centre College football policy on a permanent basis. This was great news and cordially received. The only player who seemed to bristle was Bowman McMurray.

Perhaps it was because of his belief that nobody could fill the shoes of Fayette Caldwell, but one might have surmised also that he felt a premonition of a temperamental clash. Caldwell wielded an iron hand in a velvet glove. He gained his ends by means of a lovable personality, by tact and sympathetic understanding. Andy Swope was aggressive and two-fisted, a dictator by training. He had waved too many League ball-players to the bench to be uncertain of his own authority. The doctrine of compromise might be all right, but he knew it only from hearsay. If you told him to lead the orchestra and then suggested that he play second fiddle, he would be pretty likely to smash it over your head. In a word, Andy Swope was a forceful man in private life as well as a highly competent Big League umpire. A quick temper and a soft heart were what he considered his failings, but he had learned to keep both under control.

Bowman McMurray watched this hawk-eyed, athletic stranger who snapped out his words like the crack of a whip. There was not the slightest

trace of bluster, and the smile of Andy Swope was friendly and sincere. He liked to be with college lads. It was ever so different from the National League circuit where he was a lonely figure and aloof from the players. At his ease in front of the wide stone fireplace, he told them stories and matched them jest for joke, but he was gathering impressions, sizing them up, and McMurray especially interested him. The surveillance was mutual.

What Bowman felt was not an antipathy, but a sense of uneasy foreboding. Strangely enough, he recalled, as he sat there watching Andy Swope, the boyish exploit of swimming the Rio Grande. He had gazed at the swollen current and the menacing driftwood with this same unhappy fear of struggle and disaster. He could not understand why, but the reason was almost absurdly simple. Andy Swope was another Bowman McMurray, a dozen years older. They were like two positive poles, highly charged, and it was the law that they should repel and not attract each other.

Presently the talk swung to football and Andy Swope disclosed an intimate and intelligent knowledge of the game in its latest phases. The critical McMurray could find no flaws in the rapid-fire discussion, and he was ready to admit also that such a man had the temperament of a successful coach and leader. Quick to read another man's thoughts, as his face reflected them, Andy Swope turned, with one of his quick gestures, and rapped out:

"You are the star of the troupe, I understand, McMurray. I have been hearing great reports of you. Swelled your head, has it?"

"The same old hat still fits me, Mr. Swope. Why do you ask me that?"

"No insult intended. I'm like a doctor making a diagnosis. Sorry if it makes the patient squirm. Show me an actor with an enlarged bean and I'll match it with a ball-player. It's as common as measles, but much more fatal. How would you like *me* as a boss, McMurray?"

This was a hit so direct that Bowman started and blushed. He was nothing if not honest, and he promptly answered:

"It may be a wrong hunch, Mr. Swope, but I think I've met men consider'bly easier for me to get along with."

"Well, well! And if we didn't happen to agree like Mary and the little lamb, who do you suppose would get bumped?"

"It might depend on who was wrong," declared the McMurray, who felt as though he were being crowded into a corner.

"The coach is always right, when it comes to a show-down," was the assertive reply.

The other players listened to this dialogue in a silence which was growing tense. "Len" Garretson whispered something to Fayette Caldwell, who nodded and smiled a trifle anxiously. They had grasped the significance of the situation. The shrewd discernment of Andy Swope had led him

straight to the one player who might be difficult to handle and whose obedient coöperation was essential to success. And poor Bowman, so eager to do right and win approval, was stirred to resentment as though a challenge had been flung at him.

Caldwell knew the heart of the boy so well that it seemed much wiser to make haste slowly and he adroitly diverted Andy Swope's attention. Bowman's taut nerves relaxed and his face brightened. He lingered to chat after most of the others had gone and found much that he liked in the snappy League umpire, so long as they avoided the personal issue. Crossing the campus, arm-in-arm, that Texas philosopher, the Garretson kid, remarked to the minister's son:

"Listen, Red, you deep little thinker. I have found a man brighter than you are, and his name is Caldwell. He can see about two looks farther ahead than the rest of us. He hasn't said so, but he will gradually ooze out of this football scenery and your feelings will be hurt every afternoon by a harsh person named Swope. And, believe me, he will deliver the goods."

"Maybe so, but Fayette Caldwell put this team together, Len, and gave it the spirit that will go marching on. He began it in Fort Hawley. I realize he can't carry us along, and he has picked out a man who can. I know what you mean. It demands a coach who will make or break Bo McMurray."

"Exactly so! There is only one Caldwell, who

can be easy and loving and kind and get away with it. He realizes this, so he finds him a go-getter. And if Bo and this Andy Swope don't murder each other, you want to watch our smoke."

For several days after this, Mr. Andy Swope was a spectator at the football practice, jotting down notes, getting better acquainted with the men. Now and then he jumped into a play, as active and tough as any of them, and after he had stood McMurray on his head in a wicked tackle or two, it was generally agreed that the new coach was a regular fellow. His occasional comments were concise and to the point. And with all his soul he believed in playing fair, but hard. "Bo" McMurray could forgive much in a man who knew his business, and he began to hope that his anxiety had been foolish.

As soon as he felt satisfied that he could be spared, Fayette Caldwell said good-bye to the football squad and returned to Fort Hawley. He greatly desired to remain through the final weeks of the season, but his law partner was insistent. An important case had been moved ahead on the court docket and Caldwell was needed to present the argument to the jury. It was time he quit trifling with football, wrote the partner, if he could get out from under honorably.

The team gave him a farewell supper at the eating-club, and he told them of their obligations, in his quiet, affectionate manner. Bowman McMurray was much moved and the future seemed for-

lorn. Later in the evening Caldwell dropped into the room of this adopted boy of his and they recalled the old days in Fort Hawley. What Caldwell had chiefly in his mind to say was this:

"The football proposition here at Centre College looks bigger than any of the dreams we used to have, Bo. Next year you will begin to realize it, if nothing goes wrong. For a small college like this it may mean more students, larger endowments, greater usefulness, and a wider recognition of its true worth. Advertising a sound article, that is what it amounts to. And Centre needs this encouragement. It has maintained itself because heroic men made sacrifices for a cause they believed in, to hand on a tradition that deserves to live."

"Yes, Mr. Caldwell," responded Bowman, his voice wistful. "I'll do my best, you b'lieve that, don't you, and so will the other boys from grand old Texas. About my buckin' over the traces, you know how I feel when I play football, absolutely interested. It's a mental attitude. But I give you my word and honor, Mr. Caldwell, that I will do unto Mr. Andy Swope no matter what he does to me. A soft answer turneth away wrath an' vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, so you must speak softly and carry a big stick."

"Living with John Calvin Mercer has been very beneficial," soberly returned Caldwell. "Andy Swope is a great football coach. Remember that."

"I'll try to remember everything, Mr. Caldwell. And when my grandsons come to Centre College

they aren't going to be ashamed of an old-timer alumnus named Bo McMurray."

Such was Fayette Caldwell's farewell to his young crusader who tried so hard to be good. The mantle fell upon the shoulders of Andy Swope, who wore it without the slightest evidence of worry. There was no break in the well-drilled routine when he took over the authority. He was developing the plans as they had been soundly laid out. There was more ginger in the language of instruction, and a more outspoken denunciation of this or that player's faults. They learned what it was to be "bawled out," but if the peppery coach went too far in the heat of action and hurt a man's feelings, he was pretty certain to slap him on the back and apologize on the way to the dressing-room. He was just as quick to applaud good work, and this trait averted friction with Bowman McMurray, who treasured a word of praise and played the better for it. When he made one of his wonderful runs, the coach yelled approval. And it amused Bowman to hear that dignified captain, Perley Kemp, the president of the senior class, addressed in such spirited words as these:

"Now, Perley, my boy, you are not driving a dray. Pick up your feet and *throw 'em!* Do your sleeping nights! When old Gabriel toots his horn, you'll be left at the post. Now on this next play, if you can't jump into it, I'll light a bonfire under you. *Yip, yip, zowie!* Not a bit better! Watson, the needle!"

ANDY SWOPE ENCOUNTERS A TEMPERAMENT

The industrious Andy Swope was shaping his team for the game with Kentucky State University, and this would be his début as the huntsman of the Centre College pack. It was not a cheerful prospect, if one consulted the history of football in the Blue Grass. In six years the university at Lexington had won six games from Centre. In spite of the heavy odds, the little college at Danville continued football relations and hoped for a turn of the tide. It was a neighborly affair and a social event because the two cities were only thirty-five miles apart. Andy Swope was not a man to delude himself with visions, but his private conviction was that the State University was due to be painfully surprised. Six defeats in a row might look like a habit, but seven had been a lucky number long before Andy learned to shoot craps.

Luck is a factor so potent in football that the coach had good reason to thank the blind goddess. Not a man had been seriously disabled and the chosen eleven were fit and sound. This was vitally important because of the poverty of competent substitutes. Where a large college was able to throw a fresh team into the fray, Centre staked all on one throw. That "mental attitude" which Bowman was so fond of dragging into the conversation may have had something to do with the impunity to injury. The men had no fear of harm and were not expecting it. They were entirely too engrossed in playing football.

The bolt has a trick of falling from a clear sky.

Two days before the Kentucky University game, on the last afternoon of hard practice, Andy Swope was in a grand humor. Forgotten were his barbed epithets. Nobody would have suspected that he was ever a hard, implacable, bomb-proof National League umpire. A perfect stranger could have borrowed money from him. His cap cocked over one eye, a wad of gum in his cheek, he grinned at his trained gladiators and said to himself that they were "some babies."

Out of a formation that drove at the line like a battering-ram, sped Bowman McMurray. Pushed head over heels by the momentum of his comrades, he rebounded, and, as Andy said, "he was running before he lit." One arm, as stiff as a steel rod, swept a tackler aside. Another man dived for Bowman's legs, but he wasn't there. A third sprawled in front of him and had his face stepped on for his pains. The McMurray was auspiciously started on one of those sensational dashes of his. The field beyond him was not yet clear, however, and "Len" Garretson had been blocked off and driven wide before he could close in to guard his comrade's flight.

As he ran, Bowman perceived that he was almost certain to be pulled down by one of the two backs who had converged to intercept his path. A side-long glance and he saw Garretson thirty feet away, coming with the stride of a hound, but too far away to help. A bare instant before collision with the opposing full-back, Bowman swerved, hesitated,

and threw the ball. It seemed to be hurled at random, but "Len" Garretson, leaping high, got both hands on it and sprinted for the goal line with stride unchecked. There was nothing to bar him from a touch-down and he slowed to a gallop in the last few yards. It was a brilliant bit of play and the crowd of undergraduates cheered frantically.

Suddenly the noise quieted. Something even more sensational was happening. Andy Swope had shouted to McMurray, who walked slowly toward the side of the field. The other players stood in groups, gazing silently. The demeanor of Mr. Swope indicated wrathful disgust. They had never seen his temper harden as grimly as this. McMurray appeared bewildered, but he stiffened to accept the challenge. It was what he had feared at that first meeting by the fireplace in the eating-club.

Andy Swope waved a finger quite close to the McMurray's nose as he declaimed in a voice that carried across the field:

"You big boob, you! Mighty well pleased with yourself, aren't you! Pulled off a fancy stunt of your own, and the grand-stand loved it. Tossed the ball all over the field and Garretson happened to nail it by bull luck! Put on your sweater and go to the bench and pat yourself on the back. I won't need you any more to-day."

Bowman's face usually turned red under stress of emotion, but now he was actually pale. He brushed a hand across his eyes. While he wondered what to say to this savage, unlooked-for outburst,

two or three freshmen spectators hissed the coach. He turned to face the group and called out:

"Any more of that and I'll spank a few of you little boys."

McMurray pulled his wits together and asked, with an imploring catch in his voice:

"Will you explain it, Mr. Swope? I don't understand. I wasn't tossing the ball wild. Garretson and I have practiced lateral passes together, oh, a million times. I saw a chance to score a touch-down and threw the ball."

"Bah! Who told you to make a crazy play like that?" barked Andy Swope. "Did you have a signal for it? Has this team practiced it? Suppose you tried a stunt like that against a real football team. It's a hundred to one they would have intercepted it and scored a touch-down of their own. Garretson all but missed it, with nobody near him. Explain? What's the use? One-man football don't go in this outfit, McMurray. Does that percolate?"

Bowman was beginning to be himself again. This rough-tongued, domineering coach need not have humiliated him so publicly. An error of judgment could be quietly talked over as man to man. The purpose of this harangue was to force the issue and gain the upper hand, once for all. To be called "a big boob" was a novel experience for the great McMurray. The impulse was to answer with those handy fists of his, and this was perhaps what Andy Swope expected to happen. But Bowman was no longer a fighting fool of a boy and his pledge to

Fayette Caldwell constrained him. Between his teeth he growled:

"You'll have to apologize for calling me names, but that can wait. What do you mean by sending me off the field? Am I fired from the team?"

"Suspended for to-day, McMurray. I'll play you in the Kentucky University game, but it's on probation. One more break like this and you'll be out of Centre College football as long as I have anything to do with it."

It comforted Bowman when the Garretson kid held up three fingers, close together, and said, "*Just like this.*" Without another word he plodded from the field and took the path to the gymnasium. Among his seething emotions was that of surprise at himself. It was a ray of light in the gloom that he had kept the faith and resisted the sore temptation to knock the head off Andy Swope. He comprehended that the coach had snatched at the unlucky incident of the ball thrown against orders to clinch the question of authority and obedience, once for all. With a melancholy visage, Bowman murmured one of those Scriptural recollections of his:

"Pride goeth before destruction and life is a gamble. You are here to-day and gone to-morrow and cut down like the blue grass."

As soon as the heat of battle cooled, Mr. Andy Swope also found himself low-spirited. His temperament was so absurdly like that of the McMurray that he was bound to suffer a reaction. He had

been too abusive. It was right enough to curb and punish the boy, but the job had been bungled. Such tactics might do with some rough-neck of a ball player in the Big League who tried to pull the raw stuff, but this case was very different.

"I let my dirty temper get the better of me again," sighed the unhappy Mr. Swope. "It wasn't what I did, but the way I did it. About time I signed up with a Christian college, it looks to me, and perhaps a little of it may soak in."

After supper he strolled over to the eating-club on the chance of a quiet talk in a corner with McMurray. There was no reason why they could not come to an honest understanding. "Len" Garretson was moodily loafing at the fireplace, and in reply to a question he said:

"Bo went off somewhere to eat by himself, Mr. Swope. He totes a fearful grouch. We couldn't make him listen to anything."

"Did he cuss me?" anxiously inquired the coach.

"A few, but not real sincere. He seems to hate himself, mostly. That's how he is. I told him he had got his well-known mental attitude in reverse gear and he threatened to bust me with a chair."

CHAPTER XII

OLD MAN GARRETSON'S YOUNGEST SON

BEFORE his partners were awake next morning, Bowman McMurray slipped out for breakfast at a lunch-counter and thence wandered to the campus to loiter until the first recitation at eight o'clock. He was in a solitary humor and human society annoyed him. At nine o'clock he joined the procession which jostled into the old chapel hall and found solace in a hymn which undoubtedly referred to the imminent contest with Kentucky University. Strong and hearty was his voice as he rolled out:

"Let your drooping heart be glad:
March in heavenly armor clad:
Fight, nor think the battle long,
Soon shall victory tune your song.

"Let not sorrow dim your eye,
Soon shall every tear be dry;
Let not fears your course impede,
Great your strength, if great your need.

"Onward, then, to battle move,
More than conquerors ye shall prove;
Though opposed by many a foe,
Christian soldiers, onward go."

"That is real inspiration," said Bowman to himself. "Without being disrespectful, I should call it a sanctified hunch. It ought to be good for a touch-down in to-morrow's game."

Inspiration even more uplifting awaited him.

The darkest hour is just before dawn. He went to his room for a brief interval of study and found, as he had reckoned, that his partners were occupied elsewhere. On the table was a telegram which he ripped open in some trepidation, fearing bad news from home. However, it had been sent from Cincinnati and bore a summons too good to be true.

Am visiting here, 1716 Meridian St. Can't you please run up for to-morrow afternoon? Very anxious to see you. This is urgent. NANCY OVERTON

The infatuated young man read the message several times, murmuring the words aloud and varying the emphasis until the most precious phrases finally sounded like this:

"Can't you *please* run up. . . . *Very anxious to see YOU*. . . . THIS IS URGENT."

And so Nancy believed in him, and he had not shattered her faith! She wanted to see him, and she was only four hours away. "Visiting in Cincinnati" sounded like a line from a poem. Probably she had an aunt or something in that enviable city. The message was so very cordial that it perplexed him. As though he needed any urging! Ah, he had it! She was afraid he might let football stand in the way. They had always disagreed as to the place of football in a man's life. A little more cogitation, and Bowman became anxious, because Nancy said that she was anxious. It was a disturbing word when coupled with "urgent." It sounded as though she might be in distress and required a champion.

"When a woman sends a message like that, there is only one reply," he said to himself. "She is all right, of course, and I am a dub to worry. The merest suggestion from her is a command, and here's where I slide out for good old Cincinnati."

He pawed the table for a sheet of paper and scribbled the following note, to which he pinned the telegram:

DEAR LEN:

The enclosed contents explains itself, and it is also one in the eye for poor, foolish Red Mercer and his vain delusions. I suppose he will take it hard. I can catch a train before you come back to the room at noon, so will not see you in person. Although you will agree that no gentleman could turn down a message like this, 'specially when it comes from Miss Overton, please don't think me deaf to my duty to the football team in spite of what has recently occurred. Andy Swope laid me off yesterday, and the practice to-day won't amount to anything, just running off signals, so you will not need me anyhow.

I suppose I ought to ask Mr. Swope's permission, but it might start something unpleasant, and while I wish to respect his authority it won't do to crowd me too far at this present moment. Please tell him I had to leave town on important personal business and will be back on a night train. A change of thought will probably do me good, and you know what a woman's influence means at the critical stages of a man's career. If Andy Swope blows up with a loud remark, remind him that he who ruleth an evil temper is better than him who buildeth his house upon the sand, and so forth.

Yours in the bonds, Bo

This was what young Garretson discovered,

propped against a pile of books on the table, when he drifted into the rooms just before the noon dinner hour. With a whimsical expression on his lean, serious countenance he scanned the two documents and whistled a bar of "Turkey in the Straw." If jealousy stabbed his vitals, he showed no indication of such torment. It was his unselfish conclusion that nothing could be more fortunate for Bowman's chaotic "mental attitude" than a meeting with Nancy Overton. He would probably play much better football against Kentucky University. Some impulse prompted Garretson to pick up the telegram and read it again, not with Bowman's blissful excitement, but in a manner curiously deliberate and thoughtful. He threw his cap on the table and dropped into a chair, the slip of paper still in his hand. Time passed, and he still sat there, forgetting dinner and his haste to find Andy Swope.

What has been called the wary side of his character was perhaps an inherited caution, a weighing of causes and motives, which had been transmitted to him by men of the frontier who could not afford to make mistakes. Their courage was superb, but they looked before they leaped. The law of the survival of the fittest had usually eliminated the fools who went off at half-cock. He fancied he knew Nancy Overton fairly well, perhaps better than Bowman McMurray did. The wording of this telegram jarred the critical Garretson. That last phrase, "This is urgent," seemed superfluous

and discordant. It was nonsense to imagine that Nancy was in trouble, but this was precisely the kind of appeal calculated to cause the chivalrous Bowman to throw everything else to the winds.

Taken by itself, the telegram might not have aroused suspicion. Perhaps Garretson would not have glanced at it a second time. What it did was to bring to the surface of his perceptions a hint, a rumor, an idle word, a face seen in a crowd, which had been carelessly dismissed. Every mind is littered with impressions, like disordered bits of a puzzle, and now and then an accidental touch may fit a few of them together. And then we call it intuition or something of the sort.

At length the Garretson kid folded the telegram and put it in his pocket. Then he moved down the stairs, an apple in one hand and several crackers in the other by way of a hasty meal. Turning into the office of the telephone exchange, he requested a long-distance connection with a certain fashionable boarding-school for girls in St. Louis. This required some little time, but he was seldom an impatient young man. When the call was put through he strolled into the booth and lazily spoke as follows:

"Miss Williamson's School? Thank you, ma'am. I just want to ask a question. This is Mr. Garretson at Centre College. May I inquire if Miss Nancy Overton, of Fort Hawley, Texas, is visitin' any of her friends or kinfolk anywhere?

"...She is right there in school, you say, ma'am?

No, you needn't bother to send for her if she is in the music-room. . . .

". . . I am an old friend who just took a chance that she might be near enough to say howdy to. . . .

"... If you don't mind telling her that it was the Garretson boy who had a lonesome fit. Well and happy, is she?...

"Thank you ma'am. And doing well in her studies? Glad to hear that. She speaks mighty well of your school. If you have any more like her, you're in luck. Good-bye...."

Emerging from the booth, "Len" Garretson wiped his face. He had begun to perspire. Here was a situation into which Andy Swope fitted as a confidant and adviser. Fortunately the coach was encountered on the main street, steering a course for a barber shop. They turned into the hotel near by and pulled two chairs together. The departure of Bowman McMurray had become merely accidental. Garretson explained it briefly and displayed the telegram from Cincinnati. The coach contritely exclaimed:

"I don't know as I blame the boy. I'll read him the riot act, of course, but he was so harrowed up that it was natural for him to jump the reservation when the only girl flashed him a signal like that."

"Well, so much for that, Mr. Swope. Now listen. I may be shootin' plumb wild, but I don't like this set-up at all."

"You don't waste ammunition as a rule, Garretson. Go to it."

"I have been in Lexington two or three times lately," began the limber young Texan. "You said I could go, remember? It was just for the evening. My dad has a few friends there. He always did like to ride a Kentucky saddle-horse and he breezes up to the Blue Grass to buy 'em. These men he is acquainted with mostly hang out at the Phœnix Hotel. They have treated me mighty nice, and I met some of the younger crowd—played pool with 'em in the hotel billiard-room and so on. I kept clear of anything you wouldn't like, of course. It was just pleasant and sociable, and dad enjoyed hearin' Lexington horse talk in my letters.

"There is a tremendous lot of interest in this Kentucky University game to-morrow, Mr. Swope. It would surprise you. Centre College has certainly made a reputation by cleaning up every game on its schedule so far. You can't stop people from betting on football. It is nothing against the sport, for the natural gambler will bet on anything. Pshaw, didn't I see a thousand dollars a side put up one time on a race between a couple of Texas cock-roaches? You can keep football clean in a college, but the outsiders are beyond your reach."

"Even so, my son," agreed the experienced Andy Swope. "Proceed! You intrigue me, as my high-brow friends would say. You can't shock me with any stuff about crooked gambling on sporting events, from Big League ball to prize-fights."

"My friends in Lexington warned me to keep

clear of several birds who flock together in the hotel," said Garretson. "They are smooth and well-dressed, and all that, but bad actors. They follow the tracks, and two of them were mixed up in some dirty work at Latonia."

"I know the breed," snapped Andy Swope. "They befoul every sport they touch. And they want to take a crack at college football. That's a new one! What about this game to-morrow? Much public money in sight?"

"A ton of it. Centre College seems to have made a lot of friends who like an uphill fight. It's a sporty adventure, the way they look at it. The Blue Grass was never slow in backin' its opinions. Yes, you can get plenty of action on this little old football game."

"All right. Now for the frame-up. Who is the main works?"

"Dick Stenton is one of those gay rounders at the Phœnix," answered the Garretson kid. "Ever hear of him?"

"Turn to the next page, Len. No time for ancient history. I knew that pedigreed high-binder when Princeton chased him to the bushes. What have you got on him?"

"He was in Danville three days ago and watched our practice. He didn't come on the field, but kept back on the rising ground by Breckenridge Hall. Al Cottrell, last year's Buford captain, spotted him and told me. That was sort of curious, for one thing. He was flat broke a little

while ago and the family estate clamped down on him. Now he's flush and his most intimate side-partner is Jerry Purcell, the biggest sure-thing gambler in Cincinnati. I noticed that Stenton broke away from him as soon as he happened to recognize me in the Phœnix."

"That would be like Jerry Purcell, to put up the money if the scheme looked good," observed Andy Swope. "What else?"

"Stenton has been placing some bets on Kentucky University, at even money. This information drifted in from Lexington yesterday. Nothing big, a hundred here and a couple of hundred there. He is cautious about giving odds, just coaxin' things along. He would naturally handle it that way if he was planning to make a killin'. It wouldn't do to make the big plunge all at once. That would sound too much like inside information."

"For a freshman your education has been liberal, kid. You talk sense. Now for the fake telegram."

"Bo McMurray is fifty per cent of our game tomorrow, Mr. Swope. It will be different next year, with time for you to round off the team. He is the sensation, the big noise. You know how the fellows would feel if Bo disappeared, failed to show up tomorrow without any warning."

"And Dick Stenton could afford to offer two to one on Kentucky University, and clean up!" exclaimed the coach, jumping to his feet. "Simple enough. Decoy him to Cincinnati and hold him

there till noon to-morrow. How did they get wise to the girl's name?"

"Oh, that's easy. Stenton may have wired a friend in Fort Hawley for information on Bo. Probably he picked it up from Somersworth where we went to school last year. Red Mercer had a love-sick fit and told all he knew to anybody that would listen."

"What's the answer, boy? You're clever, but it's all guess-work."

"One-thirty now," said young Garretson, glancing at his watch. "McMurray pulled out of Danville at ten-forty this morning and the train is liable to be slow. He won't reach Cincinnati much before three o'clock, and then he's got to hop in a taxi and find this address on Meridian Street. I am going to play this hand out, Mr. Swope. You can't afford to draw cards. You must be at the football field this afternoon. If you and McMurray both vanish, it will kick up a heap of foolish talk. The college will sure smell a rat."

"I see that," was the pettish reply, "and I'd cut my leg off sooner than let a scandal break. But I want to stand by."

"You don't have to tell me. That's why I like you," smiled Garretson. "But it won't do. Centre College must be kept out of it, no matter what happens. Here's the programme. I am going to beat it for Lexington right now. If I've figured this Dick Stenton at all, he will be mighty anxious about his alibi. I'm guessin' he camps right in

Lexington with the bundle of money ready to cut loose as soon as he gets the word from Cincinnati that McMurray is taken care of for the next twenty-four hours. If I draw a blank at the Phœnix Hotel, I can whizz right on to Cincinnati and be there soon to-night."

"The trains don't run right," said Andy Swope. "Will you drive it in a car?"

Garretson was moving toward the street. Against the opposite curb, in front of a bank, stood a sleek, powerful gray roadster.

"Tell Frank Prentiss I borrowed it," instructed the freshman from Texas. "You thought I was trained too fine and needed some fresh air and recreation. And tell him to forget it. He won't ask fool questions."

"Look here, Len," implored the coach, who felt helpless. "Don't get too reckless, will you? I'll be near the end of a 'phone, remember."

Young Garretson laughed and waved a hand as he climbed into the low seat of the roadster and started the motor. For several minutes after the car had vanished, Andy Swope stood in the middle of the street and talked to himself. He was a man accustomed to face death and destruction through the afternoons of summer in many a hostile baseball park. Rightly did he flatter himself that his nervous system could withstand any shock, but he might have been heard to mutter:

"One more jolt like that and the doctors couldn't cure me. I lose McMurray, and then I lose Gar-

retson, and next I lose my mind. And I sat there as dumb as a scrambled egg and let the kid get away with it. I ought to have knocked him down and sat on him. And he is going against Jerry Purcell and Slugger Dick Stenton all by himself. But he's right, confound him, in running the chances and thinking first of the good name of the college."

"Len" Garretson had one or two hasty errands before he sent the roadster roaring along the Lexington Pike. Pulling up in front of his lodgings, he ran up to grab a heavy coat. Then from the wall he took down a heavy, long-barreled Colt's revolver whose butt was dented and scratched. It rested in a worn holster which was secured to a stout leather belt. The weapon was historic, a souvenir and a memorial. Old man Garretson's youngest son had coveted it as a decoration for his college wall and the doughty sire had been persuaded. It had helped keep the peace on the border in bygone days when old man Garretson rode with the Texas Rangers, a limber kid, lean of face, with a steadfast gaze and a lazy smile.

The son of his father flipped open the chamber and shoved in the brass shells with their snub-nosed bullets. Then he slid the eloquent old weapon into the holster and buckled the belt under his coat. Returning to the roadster, he drove to the nearest garage and filled the gasoline tank. It was not yet two o'clock and he expected to be in Lexington before three. There would be no loafing on that thirty-five-mile flight. As he shot out of Danville

into the rolling country and the limestone turnpike which curved like a white ribbon between the hills, he said to himself, with a chuckle:

"Dad said the life at college wouldn't suit me at all. It was too monotonous and sort of pent-up. He can be humorous, at times."

CHAPTER XIII

A BUSINESS VENTURE GOES WRONG

Richard Stenton of Buford was a young man spoiled in the making. For a century his people had tilled the bounteous Blue-Grass soil which had brought ease and wealth to one generation after another. The Civil War had divided the clan, brother armed against brother; but the survivors returned to build anew from the wreckage and the negroes trooped back to their whitewashed cabins, freemen instead of slaves, but contented to toil for no other masters than the kindly and generous patricians of Stenton Hall amid the green uplands of Buford. Most of the boys had been sent North to Princeton, as a family tradition. A college degree was part of the equipment of a gentleman. If not hard students, they were usually popular and a credit to their name.

If a crop of wild oats was sown now and then, it was in the hot flush of youth and there was no harvest of evil and sorrow. Pride and inherited ideals and a virile strain of character held them straight in later years. They ran true to form. This Richard Stenton was exceptional. In his boyhood the flaw was undetected. He was brought up like the rest of them. What he required was a strong hand and the blessings of adversity. Out-

wardly he grew into a typical Stenton, ruddy, agreeable, stout of body.

Even when he disgraced himself at Princeton, his father deluded himself in the hope that Dick would settle down. He would put him at work and reduce that lavish allowance. Unfortunately the father died while Dick was in his early twenties and a fond and foolish mother was unequal to the task. The wayward son found himself with a considerable inheritance and brothers who realized that moral suasion would be wasted. Dick was a bad egg.

In the course of time he lost some of the friends of his own class and acquired others who hastened his disintegration. These were cold-blooded blackguards who called themselves sportsmen. They were not even gamblers in any decent sense of the word, but shrewd crooks who masqueraded as patrons of the turf. They enjoyed a certain notoriety as "plungers," book-makers, and so on, but they rarely staked their money until their nimble wits had "fixed it" so they could not lose. Whenever the opportunity offered, they corrupted other kinds of sport. Honesty was a laughable weakness of the species known as the "sucker."

These alleged sportsmen posed as good fellows, big-hearted and loyal. They spent much money on tailors, barbers, and manicures, and were admired by certain kinds of women. Their acquaintance included the lower orders of politicians, proprietors of flashy restaurants, and police captains who knew the man higher up. When one of

them achieved fame among his followers, he was called "Honest John" or "Big Ed." As a tribe these sleek, cowardly buccaneers called themselves thoroughbreds and so insulted every true-hearted horse that ever wore racing plates.

For a man of Richard Stenton's breeding, to reach this low level was a gradual descent. He was easily influenced by his environment and little by little his fine sensibilities were blunted. And as he squandered his money and needed more of it to keep the pace, the devil of necessity swept aside what remained of the pride and the honor that had once been so fastidious.

This was how he happened to be on such excellent terms with Jerry Purcell, of Cincinnati, "Smiling Jerry," the portly, pink-gilled gambler who was said to be worth a million or two. He had an eye like a fish and what passed for his soul was tinged with yellow. He was reputed to be at the head of "The Syndicate," whatever that might mean, but he was a thrifty magnate and not above turning aside to pick up a few easy dollars in some minor adventure. Nothing risky, however. He was a conservative capitalist.

Dick Stenton was a race-track acquaintance who had impressed him pleasantly. He even overlooked the fact that this young Kentucky aristocrat treated him with a certain easy condescension. Mr. Jerry Purcell's antecedents were of the humblest, and he had known poverty because his father's successful career had been so often interrupted by sentences

of from three to five years. Perhaps this was why the astute Jerry preferred to take no chances. There were much safer ways to get it than burglary.

It was when Dick Stenton was at his wits' ends to meet current expenses that Mr. Purcell ran down to Lexington to snatch a little respite from his financial cares. Stenton was sojourning at the hotel because his credit was good and he hoped to encounter a friend or two willing to accept an I. O. U. He knew better than to hint to Jerry Purcell of a loan. The magnate never confused friendship with business. It was the presence of this professional gambler, like a sinister influence, as well as the gossip of the approaching football game and the mild betting overheard in the hotel, which fastened the miserable project in Dick Stenton's mind. It was Jerry Purcell, in fact, who gave it the initial impulse while they were smoking an after-dinner cigar in Stenton's room:

"There's one game they say can't be fixed, Dick. College football! At least, I never heard of it. Too bad, with the public crazy over it—forty or fifty thousand fans yellin' 'emselves hoarse at one of the big shows. You're an old football guy. Can it be done?"

Anger flamed in the heart of the man who had once worn the orange and black of Old Nassau. His fist smote the arm of the chair as he shouted:

"Do you think every sport is as rotten as you are, you big burglar? You can't buy college ath-

letes, because they are not playing for money. But you can't understand that. What's the use?"

The large countenance of Jerry Purcell had become slightly mottled, and there was actually a sparkle in that dead eye of his. Stenton had used the word "burglar" without any ulterior intent, but why drag in family history?

"You keep your shirt on," heavily retorted the gambler. "It was just for the sake of argument. Why don't they play for money? They're a bunch of simps. Look how easy it would be to fix a game. Nothin' to it. You have to be sure of one man, no more. He fumbles a couple o' times or stubs his toe and falls down. Maybe he mixes the signals. Now think of that compared with the trouble of framin' a baseball team or a horse-race. These college lads are too honest to cross you. If you can once buy 'em, they'll stay bought. Look at these jockeys and trainers and prize-fighters, what, Dick? Crooks! You never can tell whether you've got 'em fixed."

"If you want to get your fat face pushed in, you ought to try to buy a college player to throw a game," growled Dick Stenton.

"You ought to know," replied Smiling Jerry, his good humor restored. "But now take some poor dub with fringe on his pants that's workin' his way through college. You mean to tell me that if I slipped him a thousand bucks, he wouldn't foozle the ball?"

"Talk about something sensible. You annoy me

with your ignorant yap," discourteously answered Richard Stenton.

The portly gambler was persistent. The idea interested him. It suggested a new field for professional enterprise. He was reluctant to admit that any sporting event could not be properly manipulated as a safe investment. His visage was benevolent as he went on to suggest:

"Perhaps my work is raw, not having been a rowdy-dowdy college boy. But there ought to be some way to bet wise money on this football thing. Put your educated brains onto it, Dick. I'll stand behind any proposition that sounds reasonable. And you get your split, fifty-fifty."

Stenton sulkily refused to discuss it, and the philanthropist affably talked about other things. For many years he had preyed on the weaknesses of human nature, and he had taken the measure of Mr. Richard Stenton, of Buford.

It was the next day when Jerry Purcell remarked, in a casual manner:

"This Kentucky-Centre College game seems to have the Blue-Grass sports all on edge, Dick. What's the dope?"

"Kentucky University is the favorite, by rights, but this Danville team has been coming along like a whirlwind, and I shouldn't be surprised to see it win. You won't find any better than even money offered in Lexington. That hasn't happened in years."

"Every little bit helps pay the feed bill, Dick.

If you felt safe in giving odds on Kentucky, could you shake out some Centre College coin?"

"Thousands of it, in Lexington and other towns, if the odds were tempting enough."

"Think it over, Dick. I must run up to Cincinnati for a couple of days, but you can expect me back. There ought to be something in this for both of us."

"I can't seem to get it through your fat head, Jerry, that this whole world hasn't gone crooked yet."

"Mighty few of 'em are deaf when money talks," said the gambler.

Left to himself, Richard Stenton was surprised to find that the contemptible suggestion had taken lodgment in his thoughts. Was it possible to make this particular football game a certain betting proposition, or so nearly so as to justify giving large odds against Centre College? Logically, as Stenton tested one link after another in his chain of conjecture, he discarded them until he halted to consider the factor of Bowman McMurray. Here was something to merit further analysis. And it was colored by a personal grievance which amounted to hatred. Dick Stenton winced when he recalled that football field in Somersworth and his own humiliation. The story had stained his reputation in his own home town.

This gave a new twist to his unholy meditations. He had stayed in Buford that fall in response to his mother's plea, and his readiness to coach the

high-school eleven had counted much in his favor. People were less inclined to think him bound for perdition. And he had lost this good opinion because of the unwarranted outbreak of a rough young bully from Texas.

His fertile mind quickened by a double motive, the desire of money and a sincere grudge, Richard Stenton gave much thought to the problem. It was essential that there should be no risk of discovery. To plan this delicate phase of it in detail was difficult, but he was equal to the task and the most careful scrutiny failed to find an error. It was amazingly good. So pleased was he with his own handiwork that he forgot that sense of indignation which had caused him to resent the very imputation that college sport could be tampered with. Richard Stenton had descended very far, fairly over the brink. When the amiable Jerry Purcell returned from his business trip to Cincinnati, the plot was ready to unfold. There was a gleam of admiration in the gambler's fishy eye and his laugh was unctuous.

"I knew you had it in you," said he. "It checks up elegant. Now let's take it to pieces and put it together again. I've been rentin' that furnished house in Meridian Street by the month and I'm ready to quit. There's been another shake-up at headquarters and I can't get the protection I pay for. There it is again. Even the police force crosses you. As soon as we pull off this little thing, I'll close the house. It ain't doing much anyhow,

mostly pikers who lose their small change at faro and roulette."

"If you close up, that makes a blind trail," said Stenton. "That is better than I expected. And you can keep McMurray locked up without any rough stuff?"

"A nice room, Dick, the front parlor, with a phonograph to cheer him up. Steel screens inside the windows. I put 'em up myself. He won't see a soul he can ever remember again. The nigger door-man will show him in, and turn the key."

"He won't squeal, Jerry. That is where I show a fine Italian hand. He would let you murder him before he would risk bringing a nice girl's name into it. I was that kind of a fool, once. And he will have sense enough to see that he can't get away with such a flimsy yarn as being held a prisoner in a gambling-house. He goes to Cincinnati for a little whirl and doesn't come back in time for the Kentucky game. That's all he can say to the college and the football team. Imagine him trying to put over this pipe-dream about wandering into a faro joint and having the door locked on him."

"He will keep his mouth shut, Dick," exclaimed Jerry Purcell; who added, with some vague prompting of decency, "If he's what you say he is, this fake wire from the girl will do that trick. He'll stay quiet and take his medicine. Some class to a boy like that."

Stenton scowled and felt sorry for himself. He brooded in silence before he went on to say:

"You will be in the house, Jerry, of course, all set to 'phone me when the trap is sprung. I can scatter considerable money in bets without causing suspicion, because Lexington has seen me burn it more than once. And we will plant a few smooth agents in other towns. I can land two or three good bets over the 'phone, old Colonel Harris Shelby, of Somersworth, for instance. He's a nut over Centre College football and Bo McMurray. I ought to nick him for a thousand."

"I'll have to leave this end of it to you, Dick. Your cut ought to be a pretty fair bundle of money if she don't slip on you. Well, we've got a week to look it over."

It was during the next evening that "Len" Garretson happened to catch a glimpse of Dick Stenton and Smiling Jerry Purcell together in the Phœnix Hotel. Stenton recognized the tall young Texan and was not a little disturbed. As an amateur villain, he was not proof against the qualms of alarm. It seemed like shying at shadows, but conscience still doth make cowards of us all, and Stenton passed a restless night. He would chuck the infernal scheme. Courage returned with the morning light, but there were moments when he wavered.

A few days before the football game, Dick Stenton concluded to run over to Danville and look at the Centre team during the practice hour. He was anxious to form his own opinion of the prowess of these sensational athletes and to make certain of his

assumption that the quarter-back, Bowman McMurray, was the vital factor. There was no reason why he should not make such a visit in perfectly open fashion and join the crowd of undergraduates and townspeople as an interested spectator. When he walked across the campus, however, among the stately trees and between the storied old buildings, he seemed to himself to be removed from the sordid, evil world of Jerry Purcell, and there were poignant memories of the days when he had lived amid such scenes as these. No impressions survive so indelibly as those which are written in the heart of youth during the college years.

For the moment, Richard Stenton was a Princeton man and not the partner of a professional gambler. It was a passing mood, a transitory emotion, but while it lasted he felt reluctant to approach the football field. What swayed his impulse was the realization that he was an outcast. Between him and these eager, chivalrous youngsters there stood an invisible wall. They were clean and he was rotten. Forlorn and lonely, he wandered to a long slope of the college lawn and found that it commanded an excellent prospect of the football field. There he remained, forgetting his gloomy introspection in watching the play surge across the trampled sward. It never occurred to him that this isolation was one of the trifling bits which shrewd "Len" Garretson should piece together for his undoing.

He witnessed the stormy scene in which the irate coach, Andy Swope, so blatantly punished the dis-

obedience of Bowman McMurray and heard what they said to each other. Nothing could have been better contrived to clear away any doubts that lingered in Stenton's mind concerning his scheme. McMurray had played straight into his hands. Disgraced before his fellow players, insulted by the coach, and driven from the field, the boy was in a temper for rash deeds. If he should leave town and fail to return in time for the Kentucky University game, would not the college blame it to a headlong impulse of rebellion?

In his room at the Phœnix Hotel, Stenton spent much of the evening in framing the telegram which should set the plot in motion. Nancy Overton's name had been picked up quite by accident and some time previously. A pretty young cousin of his was a sophomore in the Kentucky College of Women at Danville and she had more than once met that talkative and impressionable minister's son, John Calvin Mercer, Junior. Inasmuch as "Bo" McMurray happened to be the reigning hero, what was more natural than for this rosebud from Buford to be dying to know whether the great quarter-back had left his heart in Texas? "Red" Mercer was glad to oblige. Yes, McMurray was deeply and hopelessly in love. You might say he was pretty near blighted. One reason why he was such a desperate football player was that he didn't care whether he broke his neck or not. It had affected him that way. Her name? Nancy Overton, of Fort Hawley. She had never appreciated

dear old "Bo," but preferred men of a more intellectual type.

The pretty little cousin babbled this romance to Dick Stenton when she happened to meet him at Stenton Hall of a Sunday afternoon, for she knew he had coached the high-school team that played against this very same "Bo" McMurray. By some trick of memory, Dick Stenton had not lost the name of the fair but cruel Nancy Overton. It was ready to serve his purpose.

How to word that telegram! After many attempts, it was still unsatisfactory. But a hot-headed young fool like McMurray was not apt to be critical. Where Stenton blundered was in permitting the message to reflect his own anxiety. This was done unconsciously. He wrote a final draft, was about to send it, and then decided to add the words, "This is urgent." McMurray could interpret this any way he liked. It ought to speed him up. And again Mr. Richard Stenton had committed one of those small errors which was destined to prove costly.

The events had now arranged themselves for the day before the game. Stenton was early out of bed and required two or three drinks to give the morning a cheerful aspect. The telegram had been forwarded by telephone to Jerry Purcell in Cincinnati who put it on the wire for Danville, nicely timing the delivery. Through the forenoon Richard Stenton waited in his room, hoping to receive tidings that McMurray had swallowed the bait.

At length the 'phone tinkled and he heard the rumbling voice of Jerry Purcell say:

"All set, Dick! This is Meridian Street. He will be here to see her at three o'clock sure. He just shot a telegram through to her. It's rich, but I won't bother to read it to you. '*Absolutely delighted!*' Get that?"

Stenton grunted and shut him off. More than three hours in which to walk the floor! From noon to three o'clock! He dreaded it, for Richard Stenton could find no pleasure in his own company. His appetite was poor, but he ordered a tray sent up. Shortly thereafter his solitude was broken. Jerry Purcell had said nothing about sending him a companion, intending it as a pleasant surprise. In walked a pallid, quietly dressed young man who wore gold glasses and the air of a scholar. One might almost have suspected him of studying for the ministry. His nose was too sharp and his lips too thin, however, and for his years he seemed bored and languid. Stenton showed extreme displeasure.

"Who asked you to break in, Barney Slyke? I left word downstairs that nobody was to be sent up. Where did you come from?"

The pallid young man laid aside his coat and hat and smoothed his hair with Stenton's brushes. When he spoke it was from a corner of his mouth, and he was not effusive.

"Jerry sent me down for the blow-off. I'm to help you put the money out."

"You're a liar. The big swine told you to watch

me. He's afraid to trust me with the bank-roll. Am I right?"

Mr. Barney Slyke removed his glasses and polished them on a silk handkerchief. As the confidential secretary of Jerry Purcell, he was not in the habit of telling all he knew.

"Now don't be nasty, Dick. You and him never done business before. I'm his personal representative, understand? You may need my experience. That's the big idea. Be sociable."

"This makes me sick to my stomach," growled Stenton. "And so he was afraid I would cross him!"

"Didn't you never hear of no business methods?" inquired the secretary. "Jerry and me can learn you something."

Stenton turned his back and walked to a window where he stood absently gazing at the street below. Barney Slyke was a young man of neat and orderly habits. He sat and used a nail file with careful deliberation and then wiped the dust from his shoes with a towel. Producing a pack of cards, he spread them upon the table and diverted himself with an intricate solitaire. This he interrupted to withdraw from a side-pocket of his coat a small automatic pistol. With a handkerchief borrowed from Stenton's case, he wiped the weapon, tested the action, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Why the gun?" sourly exclaimed Stenton, who had flung himself on the bed.

"Why is a fountain pen?" said the secretary.

"You may need 'em both. Jerry don't always hand me jobs as soft as this."

Stenton went back to his station at the window. Anything was better than having to look at Barney Slyke. Some one passing along the corridor had halted at the door of this room and stood there without knocking. Barney Slyke was instantly on his feet. He was habitually suspicious of the unusual. He raised a warning finger. The man outside the door still refrained from knocking, nor had he moved on. Stenton stirred impatiently. He was neither calm nor collected.

"A friend of yours?" murmured the gambler's secretary, with an explanatory nod.

"I didn't hear anybody. We're not at home. I locked it."

And now there came a knock on the door, heavy and insistent. The men in the room were silent. They were more annoyed than alarmed. The hour was approaching three o'clock. At any moment the telephone call might come from Jerry Purcell in Cincinnati. The most harmless visitor would be unwelcome. The knocking at the door was emphatically repeated and they could hear the knob turned.

"Better see who it is, Dick," said Barney Slyke, in a low voice. "Fake an excuse and tell him to beat it. Don't let him in."

Cautiously Stenton opened the door, but was not quick enough to block the intruder who shoved ahead with a hard shoulder. Stenton staggered

back and almost fell. The collision caught him unprepared. It gave the Garretson kid opportunity to slip inside and slam the door behind him. Standing near it, he could cover his line of retreat. Richard Stenton, very nervous and jarred still more by the physical impact, morosely eyed the tall, lean youngster in the gray driving-coat who ignored him for the moment and let his glance rove to the pallid stranger with the gold-rimmed glasses who seemed so inoffensive. This was the man to watch, Garretson swiftly comprehended, for the type was unmistakable. He was not afraid of Stenton, blustering, weak, and impulsive, but the other was a bad hombre. With an air of boyish apology, "Len" Garretson exclaimed:

"Sorry I was so rude, Mr. Stenton, but I'm in a tearin' old hurry. I want to find my friend Bowman McMurray, and I had a notion you could tell me where he is."

"How should I know? He's not a friend of mine. More of your Texas manners, eh? Get out!"

"Wait a minute, Mr. Stenton, please. It's very important that I find my pardner. You have another think comin'."

Barney Slyke was extraordinarily competent in his own profession, but he was a specialist, after all, and many things were unknown to him. Among them was the college freshman, whom he regarded, from hasty impressions, as a noisy and useless insect. He was therefore not as vigilant as usual, and it was in tones of careless contempt that he advised:

"Throw him out on his ear, Dick. You don't need any help."

Mr. Stenton hesitated. He had seen this young Texan play football, besides having certain more personal recollections. Barney Slyke looked a bit weary, and decided that the easiest way to get rid of the pest was to scare him out. The right hand of young Mr. Slyke therefore strayed in the direction of the side pocket of his natty coat. He did not even trouble himself to survey the obnoxious freshman with any particular care. "Len" Garretson's right hand moved much more swiftly. Barney Slyke noted the gesture, but he was an instant too late.

A battered old long-barreled Colt's revolver was twitched out of a worn holster buckled on the hip and behind this piece of artillery was old man Garretson's youngest son. Richard Stenton retreated several paces. He was disorganized. Not so with the professional crook, who let his hand flash into his pocket, but it came out empty, for the Garretson kid spoke just in time.

"Drop it, you rat! Want me to blow your head off?"

"Quit your kiddin'," said Barney Slyke. "That cannon ain't loaded."

"Shuck your coat and throw it over here," commanded Garretson. "I've got all the excuse I want if I have to kill you. You tried to pull a gun on me. Now you sit down in that corner and play dead."

Richard Stenton interposed to say, rather shakily:

"Good God, Garretson, what is this crazy bluff of yours? Cut out the Wild-West stuff!"

"You do what I say, pronto. Empty your pockets and don't try any high dives for a bureau drawer to get a gun. There's two kinds of folks in the Blue Grass—Kentucky gentlemen and Dick Stenton. And don't you fool yourself about my burnin' powder if I have to. Now you waltz over to that 'phone."

"Don't you do nothin', Dick," came from Barney Slyke.

"Len" Garretson sidled over and tapped the secretary on the head with the butt of the Colt's. Nothing more was heard from that corner of the room. Richard Stenton grinned. He had found a gleam of pleasure in a scene as sad as this. Turning to Garretson, he sulkily exclaimed:

"What's this rot about McMurray? I didn't mislay him."

"Yes, you did! I wouldn't be sure of it if I hadn't found this snake with you. That cinched my guess. You call up Cincinnati, 1716 Meridian Street, and say it's all off. Just that! And you'd better get the kind of answer I want to hear."

"What's all off?" stupidly queried Stenton, in a childish effort to exculpate himself.

"You know! Have I got to shoot you and 'tend to it myself?"

"I believe you would," said Stenton, picking up

the transmitter with a trembling hand. He spoke to the operator and waited.

"You tell her it's life or death, for you," advised Garretson. "It may get you a quicker connection."

This produced results. Huskily Richard Stenton inquired:

"Is that you Jerry? Has he turned up yet?"

"No—expecting him any minute. The train was twenty minutes late. Everything serene at your end?"

"*No!* Get that? *No*! It's all off. Understand? Yes, the whole works! When he comes, send him away."

It was a bellow from the amazed gambler which came over the wire and his anger was indecent. He demanded explanations and called Stenton bad names.

"Where's Barney?" he demanded, when his language became coherent.

"Laid up with a sick headache," answered Stenton, with evident enjoyment.

"Crossed me, hey, the —— pair of you!"

Young Garretson snatched the transmitter and spoke into it, not excitedly.

"Listen, you big four-flusher! I just now bent a gun over your Barney and it's poked against Dick Stenton's ribs. And I've got a car waitin' outside to go after you. This is McMurray's best friend, savvy? When he shows up, you turn him back at the door. Don't you cuss *me!*"

It was in accents much milder, almost subdued, that Jerry Purcell responded:

"You win. I'll stall him off and cover myself. Give me Dick Stenton again."

"Nothing doing. He spoke his piece. I'm holding this wire till you come through. Barney is a hostage and I love to treat him rough."

The receiver in one hand, the eloquent old revolver in the other, the Garretson kid sat and waited for the word that "Bo" McMurray had been safely sent away from the door of 1716 Meridian Street. Dick Stenton leaned against the desk, his head fallen forward, and his ruddy, jovial face looked old and flabby. As he contemplated his degradation, there must have come to him a sense of something like relief, for his anger had cooled, and he could say, with a faint smile:

"I'm glad you spoiled it, Garretson. I give you my word I am. And it finishes me with Jerry Purcell and his gang."

From the corner came a bitter voice. Barney was convalescent.

"Piker! Cry like a baby, why don't you? You big lump of dough!"

Garretson gazed severely at the secretary and said to him:

"If I have to bust you again, you won't come to for a week."

No more than a few minutes passed before the welcome message came from Jerry Purcell:

"All clear. The college hick has beat it for a train. The nigger on the door eased him right out. Say, Mister, who the —— are you?"

"Oh, just a growin' boy from Texas. Now you can talk to Dick Stenton if you like."

"Hang up," growled Stenton. "I hope he rots in jail where he belongs."

Leonard Garretson replaced the Colt's revolver in the holster and buttoned the gray driving-coat. Shoving the soft cap back on his head, he looked at the room and its occupants and a slow, whimsical smile illumined his serious features. It had been an entertaining afternoon, by no means as troublesome as he had feared. The episode in no way concerned Centre College and the campus would never hear of it. Some day he would tell the story to that rugged, grizzled dad of his who had ridden with the Texas Rangers in days gone by. And old man Garretson's youngest son would take pains to point out that life at college didn't have to be monotonous and all pent-up.

It was not very much after four o'clock when young Garretson sedately drove the borrowed roadster through the outskirts of Danville and turned into the main street. The owner hailed him from the doorway of the bank:

"What luck, Len? I don't know what it was, but Andy Swope seemed to think you needed to go somewhere in the dickens of a hurry."

"Oh, I wanted to see a couple of fellows in Lexington. I was afraid they might get away from me. Thank you for the loan of the car, Mr. Prentiss. She can step right along."

CHAPTER XIV

THEY PUT THE COLLEGE ON THE MAP

With heart beating high, Bowman McMurray had hastened to keep the tryst in Meridian Street. The taxi whirled him into a residence quarter of Cincinnati, nothing pretentious, but quietly respectable. Old brick dwellings snuggled between more modern houses of stone with iron grill-work and plate-glass windows. The street was clean and wide, with no great amount of traffic. It was a perfectly proper environment in which to find "an aunt or something" of Nancy Overton. The taxi discharged its ardent passenger in front of 1716, and Bowman ran up the stone steps. Adjusting his tie and giving his coat-collar a jerk, he pressed the electric button.

After waiting several minutes, he rang again. The door swung open and an elderly colored man bowed respectfully:

"Mr. McMurray, please, to see Miss Overton," explained the caller, presenting his card.

The servitor bowed again and squinted at the card as he replied:

"Miss Overton wuz 'bliged to change her plans, suh. She lef' her regrets, an' I'll say she wuz suttinly distu'bed at missin' yo'."

"W-what, she isn't here?" gasped Bowman. "But she wired me to come this afternoon."

"Yes, suh. I carried th' message to th' telegraph office mahself. She didn't have no time to head yo' off. 'Twa'n't more'n fifteen minutes since she flew f'um this yere house to ketch a train."

"Is her aunt at home, or whoever she is visiting?" asked Bowman, a pleading note in his voice.

"No, suh. Her a'nt, Miss—Miss Ellen Hotchkiss —done went to esco't th' young lady in a cab an' she lef' word she wouldn't be back till late."

"And Miss Overton left no explanation for me?"

"It wuz terrible sudden, Mistah McMurray. 'Pears like she had news f'um home. I never did see a beautiful young lady mo' distressed, suh, than she wuz at bustin' her date with you."

"Thank you," dolefully murmured the stricken suitor. "I reckon I'll get a letter from her."

"Of co'se. Come to recollect, suh, them wuz her las' words. Good-evenin'. Mebbe you kin find her at th' depot if yo' hustle."

This was a happy suggestion. Bowman raced down the steps and vainly sought a taxi. The street-cars were convenient, however, and he made a rapid journey to the Union Station. Never was that teeming terminal ransacked more thoroughly, but there was no glimpse of fair-haired, gracious Nancy Overton. At the lunch-counter Bowman revived himself with a substantial snack and sat himself down to await the departure of the Blue-Grass Special at four o'clock for Danville. It had been a bewildering experience, enough to take ten years off a man's life, he said to himself. You

simply could not tell what a woman was liable to do.

Anyhow, Nancy had been anxious to see him or she wouldn't have sent that telegram. It was a frightful disappointment, but he would take it smiling and show his sand. If "Red" Mercer dared to guy him about it, there would be rough work in their old Kentucky home. As soon as he was southward bound in the Blue-Grass Special, the resilient emotions of the McMurray began to recover from the shock. Although a pure woman's influence was a pearl of greatest price, perhaps it was just as well not to mix it with a football game. As things had turned out, this brief absence would cause no serious trouble with Andy Swope and they could manage to keep the peace through the Kentucky game of the morrow. As for their future relations, Bowman saw through a glass darkly. His proud spirit could not submit to the coach's dictum, "on probation."

It was only eight-thirty o'clock in the evening when he climbed the stairs to the rooms of The Lone Star Corporation. With his heels on the table and his shirt-sleeves rolled up, "Len" Garretson was peacefully reading a French lesson. He laid the book down, waved a hand at the truant, and drawled:

"Fast work, boy. Looks like you proposed to her in a hurry and got thrown. As easy to look at as ever, was she?"

"I didn't see her," sheepishly confessed Bow-

man. "The trip was a false alarm. She had to cut her visit short. Something very urgent must have happened. All I got was a good-bye she left for me."

"Hard luck! Well, you have her on record. She never was as anxious for me or Red."

"Where is foolish old Red?" was Bowman's anxious query. "I s'pose you showed him that telegram."

"Not me, Bo. And have you two fightin' duels all over the place? Peace and quiet mean too much to me."

"Thank the Lord. He'd make a red-headed nuisance of himself, with his silly 'haw,' 'haw,' and so on. Did you happen to discuss me at all?"

"Oh, I told him you had just wandered off for the day to forget Andy Swope. You can feed him any fairy story you like."

"What did the team do this afternoon, Len? Light work, I s'pose."

"I wasn't there, Bo. Andy Swope said I could run over to Lexington for the afternoon. I just played around. A little change like that made me feel fine."

"In the train coming back I heard there was a good deal of betting on the game," said Bowman. "Did you pick up any good dope in Lexington?"

"There was some talk of offering two to one on Kentucky University, but it took a sudden slump. Even money is the best they will do. Can we lick 'em, Bo?"

"I don't know whether we *can* or not, but I know we're going to," fairly shouted the McMurray. "Don't you ever put it up to me that way again."

"Gosh! I wish I could get more of that fighting spirit of yours," wistfully exclaimed the Garretson kid. "It's grand! I reckon I am too mild and easy-goin'."

Unaccustomed to large football crowds, Danville rubbed its eyes the next day when the automobiles came streaming in over every turnpike and one special train after another pulled into the station. It was an army with banners which swept the restaurants as bare as the cupboard of Old Mother Hubbard and bivouacked in picnic parties all over the campus.

After dinner at noon, the three partners of The Lone Star Corporation sauntered from the eating-club to their rooms for a quiet hour before reporting to Andy Swope at the gymnasium. They were not nervous, but rather subdued. They had not expected that thousands of people would come to see them play. It increased the sense of responsibility, of duty to the cause. They had ventured to look forward to something like this as possible in another year or two.

Young Garretson considered this an excellent time to darn a pair of socks. Fired by this example, McMurray decided to sew on a button or two. John Calvin Mercer, Junior, was the shameless idler who talked words to which nobody paid much

attention. It was he who opened the door to a summons and gazed down at a dirty-faced urchin who wore a blue cap and shoved a yellow envelope at him.

"Telegram for you, Red. Sign the book. Say, will we trim 'em?"

"Certainly, Bud, if we can score often enough," replied John Calvin. He closed the door and stood reading the telegram which caused an expression of rapt self-satisfaction to appear on his freckled countenance. It was positively smug. After a leisurely pause, he condescended to read it aloud.

St. Louis, November 12.

Good luck and best wishes for victory to the three heroes from Texas.

NANCY OVERTON

"Haw! haw! Listen to that!" shouted the idiotic Mercer. "She mentioned you fellows so as not to hurt your feelings, but she sent it to *me*. Isn't that highly significant?"

"It signifies that for a man of intellect, you have a soft spot in the top of your head," pleasantly suggested Garretson. "You have been pesterin' the poor girl with letters and she happened to know the address where we all live. That's why."

Poor Bowman McMurray was staring at the obnoxious Mercer with a puzzled and hostile scrutiny. Nancy Overton was making life very complicated with her telegrams. Drawing a long breath, Bowman inquired:

"From St. Louis, did you say, Red? When was it sent?"

"At nine-ten this morning," answered Mercer, "and addressed to *me*."

"We heard that. Now shut up. What kind of a football game can we play with a centre-rush that has gone feeble-minded? From St. Louis, this morning! Oh, yes—Nan Overton is in her last year at school there."

Garretson laid aside the sock and the darning-cotton and grasped "Red" Mercer by the shoulders. Marching him to the door, he sternly exclaimed:

"The fresh air for yours. Go get those football shoes you left at the repair shop to have new cleats put on. Forgot all about it, didn't you. I'm glad the Lord gave *me* more horse sense than brains."

Still waving the telegram in the air and full of vain boastings, the minister's son galloped down the stairs.

McMurray sighed forlornly and observed:

"She went right back to school from Cincinnati yesterday, Len. That explains part of it. Maybe she played hookey to visit her aunt, Miss Ellen Hotchkiss, at 1716 Meridian Street. What's your idea?"

"Something like that, Bo, though Miss Overton isn't the kind to break out of the corral that way. However, back to school she trailed. You and I can figure that out. What's the matter with you? Aren't you glad she made the trip all safe and sound?"

"Positively yes. But here she goes and wires Red Mercer, and not a word of pity an' regret an' everything for me that was left flat on his back in Cincinnati yesterday. If anybody had a telegram coming to him from a certain source it was B. McMurray."

"She calls you a Texas hero, don't she? That's enough to make me fight a wolf bare-handed and give him the first bite. Why, boy, if I don't hold myself back this afternoon, what this game'll need won't be a referee, but a grand jury."

"I was entitled to a personal message of sympathy," persisted the McMurray; "not a blanket order like that."

"It may come in a letter, special delivery, Bo," said Garretson, a little worried by his comrade's doleful frame of mind. "Girls like Nancy Overton are too refined and sensitive to tell their feelings to the Western Union. It's a good sign, honestly. Her sending this good luck and howdy message to Red showed she was thinking of you, too. You mustn't be jealous of the poor old jack-rabbit."

"Jealous? May the best man win, God bless him," declaimed Bowman, with a gesture. He was returning to form.

Presently they drifted into the street and waited for Mercer to join them. They were becoming restless, and it was time to walk across the campus to the gymnasium and the locker-room in the basement. There they found the rest of the team and the substitutes. It was a very small force, perhaps

sixteen men in all, not like the battalion which one of the great universities is able to hold in reserve for emergencies.

By a sort of unspoken impulse, the five freshmen of the team sat on a bench in a row after they had put on their football gear. They were brothers in the bonds—the trio of Texans, and Duncan Fordney and Alfred Cottrell, gentle, courageous sons of old Kentucky. The others were older in years, but not so wise in football.

In came the coach, Andy Swope, and some of them expected to hear him break out in rough and stinging exhortation. This was not at all his mood, however, and they were to learn what manner of man he was at heart. Perceiving that two or three of the players appeared to be a bit frightened by his entrance, he stood silent for a moment in the crowded locker-room. It was a mistake to call him hard-featured now. He had learned something from these boys of his, even while he taught them football. He was wondering just what to call this spirit which seemed different from anything he had found in other college elevens. Ah, he had it! Consecration was the word!

The discovery impelled him to reveal to them the ideals which had been kept untarnished through his battering career among men of all sorts and conditions. It was an unusual speech for a football coach, on the eve of an important contest, but Andy Swope doffed his cap and said:

"I say my prayers every night, boys, and I hope

you haven't grown out of the habit. All decent men pray to God in one way or another, even if they don't put it in words. You know what it means when they call Old Centre a Christian college. Nothing to be ashamed of in that, is there? The whole world needs more of it. Well, this is going to be the same kind of a football team. Not that we're going to pray God to help us win all the time, but we can pray to be kept from injury and bad temper and playing dirty ball. And such prayers will be answered."

"A few of us said a prayer before a high-school game in Somersworth," spoke up Bowman McMurray. "And we felt better for it. Faith and works, and God helps them that help themselves, is good doctrine, Mr. Swope."

"Red" Mercer, the minister's son, had beheld an unquenchable faith in God lived day after day by a mother and father who were steadfast amidst many discouragements. Now that he was ready and waiting for the ordeal of battle, his nerves were tense with excitement and he cried:

"Darn it all, I'll pray if you will, Andy Swope."

Simple, sincere, and moving were the petitions uttered by the player and the coach as they knelt beside a bench in the locker-room while the others bowed their heads. In later contests, on fields far from home, they were to be called, and sometimes jeeringly, "the praying Kentucky Colonels," but it is not in the record that they were any the worse for it, nor were the foemen heard to refer to them

as mollycoddles. It became a custom, a ritual, to pray for strength and patience and forbearance, that win or lose the shield should not be tarnished.

The coaches at Kentucky University had made themselves familiar with the style of football taught by Fayette Caldwell and Andy Swope, and they were not to be surprised by dashing play or novel tactics. They came to Danville with a heavy team which was also fast, intelligent, and aggressive. And a moral factor in their favor was the string of six annual victories in succession. It was difficult for them to realize that Centre College could be really formidable. In every kind of contest, of war or peace, prestige is a very tangible asset. A thousand undergraduates had come from Lexington to display their allegiance by means of those strange and frenzied war-cries which are known as college cheers. In their vocabulary there was no such word as defeat.

Now even his best friends were not always able to prognosticate the peerless McMurray. As for Andy Swope, he had not yet plumbed the depths at all. While the rival elevens tossed the ball about and waited in leash for the officials to finish the last-minute conference, Bowman squatted on his heels and plucked tufts of grass. He had thought of something and desired to be undisturbed. His gaze followed the sturdy figure of the captain of the team, Perley Kemp. Here was a splendid man who had played four years for Centre College and this was the last big game of his career. There had been

precious little reward or recognition for all his unselfish, devoted labor.

During this sensational season he had been eclipsed by the freshmen on his team. People didn't really appreciate how good he was, reflected Bowman, as a sandy, reliable old half-back. Now if he could make the winning touch-down in this Kentucky game, it would be poetic justice and so on, and think what it would mean to his wife and children as soon as he had any! It made the McMurray feel so noble and happy that he forgot to be nervous. Instead of seeking more bouquets for himself, he was following the Golden Rule, and what would Andy Swope think of that?

It was Perley Kemp himself who yelled to Bowman to come out of his trance and line up for the kick-off. Instantly the idealist from Texas was the indomitable, quick-witted quarter-back, keyed to play football with heart and soul and body. "Red" Mercer lifted the ball high and far with that ponderous but accurate foot of his, and the game was on. Kentucky promptly moved against the enemy with an efficiency which was disconcerting. Forward passes, deceptive shifts, plunges straight ahead, were executed with dazzling precision. But as soon as the Centre College players perceived that the attack was fashioned very much like their own offensive, they began to hamper and check it. The action was like the foil and parry of a brilliant swordsman against a master-at-arms of his own school.

In first-class football there is a sense of divination, almost uncanny, which anticipates and frustrates the opponents' intentions. This was Bowman McMurray's peculiar gift, and time and again his warning shout told his comrades where to be on guard. They halted the high-geared Kentucky machine and, in turn, endeavored to set in motion their own perfected advance. It gained ground, but not steadily. Forward passes were hurled with the accuracy of a baseball, but the fleet-footed men from Lexington were not often tricked. They swooped at the runner before he could get into his stride and spilled him violently. McMurray was thwarted whenever he attempted to dodge and double clear of the last line of defense.

In this deadlock there recurred to him his noble inspiration concerning Captain Perley Kemp. It seemed rather ridiculous now. Conferring winning touch-downs as a reward of merit promised to be difficult if not impossible. However, sentimental obligations were always binding in the sight of Bowman McMurray, and he said to "Red" Mercer during a breathless interval:

"Pass it around that good old Perley is the boy to score. He deserves it, and the Lord knows we need it. Whirl in and jam him through somehow. This idea will give 'em all an extra punch."

"Yes, but the best he can do is buck the line for short gains, Bo, and that'll never save this football game. We're sure to lose the ball on downs."

"You mind me, Red, and do unto others. What do you think you said your prayers for, anyhow?"

In this worthy impulse there was concealed a certain strategy of which not even Bowman himself was aware. Physically Perley Kemp was as hard as a rock and could stand a vast amount of punishment. In the open and varied style of play, however, he had been used much less than McMurray or Garretson or Gentry, the other half-back. Human pile-drivers were no longer in vogue. In this instance, as soon as the word went round that Perley was to bear the brunt of the attack, the team closed in for formation of a more old-fashioned kind.

Perhaps Perley grasped the fact that this was his great and farewell appearance, and there was a terrific stimulus in the realization that his comrades were relying on him when all else had failed. At any rate, he smote the line again and again, and when the scrimmage pulled itself apart he had plunged forward three and four and five yards. At the verdict of "first down," McMurray decided to try the slow but resistless Perley Kemp again.

The team from Lexington was of a perplexed, uncertain mind. They had not been drilled to expect just this kind of an onslaught from the nimble and tricky Centre College eleven. Possibly it masked some new, unforeseen manifestation of Andy Swope's genius that was designed to catch them napping. And it was odd to hear the fierce yelps of approval which greeted McMurray's cries of

"Once more for Perley's party, boys! Go get him a present! He wants that touch-down!"

Perley's grateful smile was spoiled by a swollen lip, but he expressed his feelings by hurling himself between guard and tackle for five yards more. As he fell, with two or three men on his back, the ball flew out of his arms. It bounded crazily as Bowman McMurray shot past the prostrate Perley Kemp. Not for him the safe and stupid axiom of falling on the ball in such a moment as this. Andy Swope had discarded it as obsolete. His black hair flying, Bowman scooped up the ball on the wing and scudded straight toward the goal posts, forty-odd yards distant. It was almost a clear field, for the Kentucky team had been playing well in to hold the dangerous onsets of Perley Kemp.

The throng of spectators roared delirious delight. This was what they had come to see. This was the McMurray whose fame had spread beyond the Blue Grass. Nothing could prevent those stout legs of his from carrying him to a sensational touchdown. He was only a few yards from his destination when the uproar was suddenly hushed. The multitude was affected with horror. McMurray, the sure-footed and swift, had stumbled. He failed to recover himself, tripped again and fell headlong. Before he could scramble to his knees, a brawny Kentucky man was upon his back and he was pinned to the turf, still clutching the ball.

No more than three yards from the goal line!

It was heart-breaking, but his courage was unshaken, and when his companions came pounding along to line up for the scrimmage, he slapped Perley Kemp on the back and confided in his ear:

"Never ask me what I stumbled over. You just take that ball and go to it!"

It was to be expected that in such a crisis as this McMurray would endeavor to put the ball across himself. Kentucky was wary of one of those daring end runs of his. The Centre team feinted as though to protect such a manœuvre, but Captain Perley Kemp snatched the ball from the quarterback's deft hands and was fairly lifted and thrown bodily into the hole that "Red" Mercer opened for him. Then it looked as though both teams were heaped on top of him. McMurray wriggled out from under and behaved like a howling dervish. The crowd accepted the pantomime as conveying glad tidings. Captain Perley Kemp had scored a touch-down for Centre College.

For once "Len" Garretson failed to kick the goal and the tally of 6–0 was the narrowest kind of a margin by which to win. This, however, was how it stood when the game was ended. The victors fought their way to the gymnasium, after being turned upside down upon the shoulders of their vociferous friends, and, before Andy Swope could join them, Bowman hastily dragged Perley Kemp into a corner and solemnly exclaimed:

"Give me your sacred word of honor, old man, that you will never breathe what I said about

stumbling. I mentioned it so as to put the pep into you for that last play."

"You did actually trip yourself on purpose, Bo? To give me the chance to make the touch-down? It was mighty fine of you, but what a risk you took!"

"First down, and only three yards to make? I knew you could do it, Perley. But listen, if Andy Swope suspected it, he would—"

Bowman moved away with an air of conscious innocence. The coach was hurrying in to congratulate his boys. He halted and glanced very keenly, first at Perley Kemp and then at Bowman whom he detained by holding his arm.

"Great work, McMurray! We had the edge on them by just about one touch-down, and the boys delivered it. You showed good judgment in using Perley Kemp so hard, although it did look foolish to me. The change of pace had Kentucky guessing."

"I figured it was worth trying," replied Bowman, with a certain caution. Words of praise were pleasant, but the eye of the coach bored like a gimlet.

"Funny how you happened to fall down with nothing to trip over," said Andy Swope. "I never saw you do that before. A dry field and smooth dirt in front of the goal posts. I walked over to look at it just now."

"I was going so fast that I ran myself off my feet," ingenuously explained Bowman. "Lucky it didn't happen any sooner. With only three yards to go, I didn't spill the beans. Fine, wasn't it, that old Perley was the lad to put it across."

"Giving the ball to Perley to score was a foxy play, and it worked," admitted Andy Swope. "They were afraid of you, McMurray. But let me tell you one thing. If I felt sure of my suspicion I would—"

"What suspicion, Mr. Swope? Great Scott, are you and I always going to misunderstand each other?"

"Not if I once get your curves plotted," grimly exclaimed the coach.

"It's inconsid'rate to spoil a victory like that," protested the aggrieved McMurray.

"Did you intend to let Perley Kemp make that touch-down?" demanded the inquisitor. "You know exactly what I mean—when you tripped over yourself and did a fake tumble."

"Well, Mr. Swope, if you are always going to be accusin' me of something or other, I might as well resign from the team and get my education at some college that has a fair-minded coach."

"Don't talk bunk. You couldn't be driven away from Centre. But remember what I said. On probation, my boy! What would I do if I could cinch this little suspicion? I'd hang your hide on a fence."

"Honestly? Oh, I forgot to offer you my hearty congratulations on the game, Mr. Swope. The college is mighty fortunate in getting a coach like you. This is a great day for Old Centre, and most of the credit belongs to you."

Bowman offered his hand, and Mr. Swope shook

it in an absent manner. For a League umpire he appeared to lack decision. While he wondered what to say next, the beaming McMurray hastened to the locker-room to rejoice with his weary comrades. He was in a delightful frame of mind. Virtue was its own reward, and in sacrificing the chance to make the winning touch-down he had overcome his besetting sin.

A week later the town and the college combined to honor the team with a banquet at the hotel. At the long table sat prominent citizens, members of the faculty, and representative undergraduates. The glee club sang between the speeches which began with the president of the college and finished with Bowman McMurray who responded to the toast, "Why Is a Freshman?"

Listening to so much eloquence had exhilarated the young man. He was lifted above himself and in a mood akin to tears. His eulogies embraced Centre College, the grand old State of Texas, and most fervidly of all his companions of the football eleven. He seemed particularly anxious that the company should realize the sterling worth of Captain Perley Kemp.

"The man of the hour, that's what I should call this unfaltering leader. Through clouds of discouragement he pursued the even tenor of his way, year after year, when football at Centre was small potatoes an' few in a hill. Nothing showy about him, but built like a brick house to stand when the rains descend and the flood comes and the wicked

flee to the tall timber. These are the men to tie up to and they have made Kentucky famous. On many a dark an' bloody ground you have seen Captain Perley Kemp plug ahead with the ball, and even if he was slow in startin' and didn't gain much distance, a stout heart beat beneath that ragged jersey.

"Can you stop thrilling whenever you think of that last game, the climax of this hero's long career? When a bunglesome, left-footed quarter-back named McMurray practically threw it away by falling on his face an' Perley Kemp snatched an immortal touch-down from the very jaws of disaster? There is the test, gentlemen, when a man whirls his rope at opportunity, as my cow-punchin' friend Garretson would say, and throws an' ties her as she streaks past him. Watch Perley Kemp in after life! It's the one best bet that you'll hear from the man who led Centre College to victory against the dangerous minions of Kentucky University."

As soon as the applause subsided, Andy Swope whispered to the Garretson kid who sat beside him:

"On the level, does he believe himself when he talks that way? You ought to know."

"Plain, sensible men like you and me, Andy, can't keep up with him. Sometimes I wonder if he isn't afflicted with genius. That's one of the signs. You can't tell if a genius is coming or going."

CHAPTER XV

A GREATER GAME THAN FOOTBALL

McMURRAY'S informal eating-club had become so popular that he moved it off the campus into larger and more convenient quarters and advertised for patronage. The response was prompt and enthusiastic. Quite unexpectedly the problem of self-support was solving itself. "Red" Mercer made himself so useful as cashier and expert accountant that he was made a partner, and so The Lone Star Corporation resumed business activity. Garretson helped during the rush hours, but refused any share in the profits. It was a social diversion, said he, and he liked to listen to so many kinds of foolish conversation.

In his relations with Bowman McMurray, one thing worried him a little. Of course, no letter had come from Nancy Overton to explain the broken engagement and sudden departure from Cincinnati. Day after day Bowman had awaited and confidently expected it. He was troubled and rather bewildered, but soon he had ceased to mention it. Pride constrained him. He could endure no more bantering from John Calvin Mercer without losing his temper, and he felt too deeply hurt to parade the grievance to "Len" Garretson. Life was full of mysteries, so you were told in the stories you read, but this was the first one that Bowman had ever

encountered. He dismissed as impossible the idea of writing to ask Nancy to explain.

Garretson debated it with himself in his clear-headed fashion and remained convinced that his conduct had been correct. If these two young people should ever have any serious intentions, a misunderstanding like this could not block the course of true love. It would give them something interesting to wrangle about the next time they met. To reveal the whole story to Bowman might have consequences much more serious. He was a tempestuous young man when provoked too far, and he had detested Mr. Richard Stenton of Buford ever since that high-school game in Somersworth. It was easy to imagine that heaping this fresh fuel on the flame might cause the McMurray to seek Mr. Stenton and inflict violent punishment.

It was better that the clouded episode should be forgotten, for the sake of the college and all concerned. Bowman and John Calvin Mercer tarried in Danville during the Christmas vacation. It was a costly journey to Fort Hawley and they had ambitious plans of increasing the equipment of The Lone Star Restaurant. They were therefore denied the precious privilege of beholding Miss Nancy Overton. "Red" Mercer fumed and sighed and talked about it, but Bowman kept his own thoughts locked within his manly breast. As Garretson had truly said on one occasion, strong men suffered in silence.

When the spring-time came to the campus (this

was in the fateful year of 1917), all the vital and absorbing interests, athletics, fraternities, girls, scholarship marks, were swept aside like leaves in a gale of wind. War was a game ever so much greater than them all. Those older buildings of Centre College had known it once before, and intimately, when classrooms and halls had been filled with sick and wounded Confederate soldiers. But even then the college had not closed its doors to students, and so now the president told the boys in chapel that it was their duty to continue their education until the country summoned them. He wisely persuaded most of the younger lads to finish the college year in June and then to undertake such training as should make them useful to the armed forces of the United States in the war against Germany.

The advice of the patriotic president failed to appeal to three freshmen who hailed from Texas. They held a council of war in their rooms, not long after the momentous tidings had aroused the campus. Bowman McMurray strode the floor and proclaimed what his own intentions were.

"How about you, Len, old man? Maybe this war won't sit around and wait for us. Then wouldn't you be sorry? Old Colonel Harris Shelby was chasin' Yankees with a cavalry sabre when he was younger than we are. And he never had any football training, which is an excellent preparation for war, let me tell you."

"Who are you arguing with? Yourself?" in-

quired the Garretson kid, who had stretched himself upon the sofa with his hands under his head. "How do you get to this war, Bo? And when do we start? Early to-morrow suits me. What about Red? Will we let him go?"

"I don't think so," answered McMurray, before John Calvin Mercer could voice his own heated opinion. "The men with brains ought not to be killed off early in a big war like this. Red would make a corking artillery officer, for instance. It takes all kinds of mathematics to aim at something that isn't there and hit it where you can't see it. And, besides, Red has led a sheltered life. He ought not to go surgin' out to kill Germans on the impulse of the moment like us hard cases."

"Will you keep still?" shouted John Calvin, in huge disgust. "If you had any brains you would do the only sensible thing—keep your shirt on and try to get into some kind of an officers' training course. There may be something of the kind here at Centre College. If we are too young for that, we'll peg right along at our studies, as Prexy says. This is not a freshman's war, Bo."

"You are a brave, red-headed man with big feet," replied McMurray, "but I know two freshmen you can't lay down the law to. The Lone Star Restaurant is yours till I come back. Len will have 'em out of the trenches by Christmas. I'm going to join the Navy."

"What for?" cried Garretson. "Just because you can swim like a fish? Here's where we part com-

pany. That time I was the Texas Navy on the Rio Grande was the last cruise for old man Garretson's youngest boy. Nothing doing; not if they made me an admiral."

"Len, this is awful! The Navy is my natural choice. It always was. The Lone Star Corporation is all shot to pieces."

"I don't like your figure of speech, Bo. We can breeze up to Cincinnati together anyhow. War busts a lot of family relations. I'm all set to enlist in the Regulars. Those birds will be shoved across to France pretty pronto."

John Calvin Mercer interposed to say:

"It's ridiculous for you two to separate. Why don't you toss up for it?"

"If Len wasn't so stubborn, he would come along with me."

"You can't reason with Bo. He's a mule."

As football had gripped them, so now it was war. The spirit was much the same, high purpose and devotion to a cause and the sense of a great adventure. The only regret was in parting with each other, but prolonged discussion found their paths still divergent. The call of the sea and the magic of ships and winds lured the McMurray in whose soul was the true romance, while you would expect to find a Garretson nowhere else than in the ranks of the Regular infantry with rifle and cartridge belt, and the long, long trail ahead.

They made no round of campus farewells, but slipped away in the early morning and only "Red"

Mercer was at the station to see them off. He was also certain that his decision was right, but this made it none the easier, and a tear rolled down his freckled cheek as he clasped the hands of his comrades twain. Easily affected, Bowman winked rapidly and wiped his eyes. Breaking away from good old "Red" was sad business.

"Darn it all, I'll pray for you," exclaimed John Calvin.

"I b'lieve you will," replied Bowman. "And I reckon we may need it more than we did in football. Regards to Andy Swope. He is morbidly suspicious of me, but perhaps he will be sorry."

"No motion-picture stuff," severely put in the Garretson kid. "So long, Red. Don't let 'em short-change you in the restaurant, and remember us to all the folks in Fort Hawley."

"And you are starting off for war without saying farewell to Miss Overton?"

"Ah, yes," sighed Bowman. "What a chance for the big scene!"

The train moved and the two volunteers jumped to swing aboard the steps of the last car. They looked back and had a final glimpse of John Calvin Mercer, Junior, who walked away with his chin down and his hands behind him as his reverend sire was wont to do when his mind was heavy laden. They had sent telegrams to their own parents, but it had not occurred to them to ask permission. The Lone Star Corporation was in the habit of acting independently. From the

Garretson ranch the old Texas Ranger had wired back:

"*That's the boy. You beat your brothers to it.*"

The service was ready with a warm welcome for two such recruits as these. The young lieutenant of the Navy who promptly enrolled McMurray displayed a cordial interest in him.

"I saw you play last fall, Bo," said he. "I was raised in old Kentucky. If you can be sent East for training, you will stand a better chance of shoving off in a ship bound overseas. I will do what I can for you."

This was hopeful, and Garretson also had good tidings to report. He was to be sent to an infantry outfit of Pershing's old division which had guarded the Texas border, and the rumor was that these would be among the first troops sent to France. A day or two together in Cincinnati and the partners bade each other good-bye.

Bowman had one regret which he could not help mentioning.

"You saved my life one time, Len, and if we could serve together I might have a chance to save yours. Of course that would be a delightful coincidence. But it cannot be."

"Thank God for that! I never did fall for this hero stuff of yours. A buck private is too busy to be a hero. Take care of yourself, Bo. See you in Danville, as soon as we get done with this little old war."

And now the Navy undertook the education of

Bowman McMurray. It taught him certain things which he had hitherto failed to grasp. That ideal which he called the college spirit was a feeble glow compared with the traditions and doctrines of a service whose exemplars were Paul Jones and Isaac Hull, Farragut and Dewey. During the training period, brief and intensive, he began to comprehend what obedience and discipline really meant and how vital they were to success.

An order came from a desk in Washington. A draft of recruits, McMurray among them, slung their canvas bags on their shoulders and were herded into a Navy tug. They had no idea of where they were going, but they were jubilantly on their way. Among the long wharves and stone basins of a Navy yard they scrambled ashore and were scattered to fill the complements of a division of destroyers, the lean, gray coursers of the sea.

The American destroyers reappeared in the port of Queenstown on the Irish Sea and promptly began to share the toil and danger of the British service in hunting submarines and safeguarding the roads of the troop convoys and the supply ships. Blow high, blow low, they went plunging and reeling a thousand miles offshore, a week at a time, the foaming seas sweeping their decks, funnels white with salt spray, crews hanging on by their eyelids, and haggard young officers in oilskins clinging to the bridge and calling it the finest game in the world.

Bowman McMurray made many friends, as he was bound to do, but the one he liked best of all

was old enough to be his grandfather, Chief Quartermaster Michael Brennan. Gray as a badger he was, and the red hash bars or enlistment stripes ran clear to his elbow, but the bluejacket rash enough to call him a condemned old relic had to be quick with his hands and fast on his feet to get away with it.

For the heart-breaking task of whipping flighty young gobs into shape, of teaching them the immemorial honor of their calling, such a chief petty officer as Mike Brennan was worth his weight in gold. He had earned retirement, but there was no driving him out of the service nor would he accept an easier billet. He was a destroyer man and naught else, said he, and where was there any one that had seen him crack. He had rolled and tumbled in them on every sea, ever since the little tin pots of the Spanish War that were half-drowned off Santiago and Matanzas.

A childless man without home ties was this barnacle of a chief quartermaster and his allegiance was therefore undivided. Now and then there had come under his eye some lad who had an uncommon aptitude for the service and a realization of its ideals. To such a bluejacket old Mike was a father as well as a taskmaster, and the word went round that he had adopted another one. It was more than a personal fondness, something deeper and more compelling, the desire to transmit his own wisdom and devotion and keep the torch alight after he was gone.

Of all the youngsters who had won Mike Brennan's paternal solicitude, there had never been one so promising, in his opinion, as this intrepid, eager McMurray. Now and then, while ashore in Queenstown, Bowman missed the liberty boat or was logged for some other minor infraction of the regulations. And whenever the culprit was haled to the mast for minor punishments, in the background hovered old Mike Brennan, never putting in a word, but praying that the youngster might extenuate himself and that his record might be spared a black mark. The officer of the deck, human but inflexible in dealing out doses of liberty stopped or pay forfeited, confessed that he hated himself when Seaman Bowman McMurray was on the penalty list. The presence of Mike Brennan was enough to make the mildest officer feel like a heartless brute.

More destroyers came hurrying over the Atlantic while the summer waned and the world was in an agony of waiting for America to send her millions of fighting men across the bridge of ships. They were on the way, this Bowman McMurray knew, when his division of tireless destroyers steamed out into the gloomy, rain-swept autumn weather and met the swinging seas in gale after gale. Far out at the secret rendezvous, in mist and spray and darkness they met the huge convoys of lumbering transports and shepherded them safely into the ports of France.

It was no longer Seaman McMurray, but Quarter-

master McMurray, second class, and he learned to stand his trick at the brass wheel on the bridge and steer the skittish destroyer which had to be coaxed and humored like a mettlesome colt, or he took his station with old Mike Brennan and mastered the intricate business of semaphore and blinker and flag signals.

There came a spell of perfect weather, a cradling sea and a sky blown clear of gray vapor. Soon after daybreak, the destroyers sighted the funnels of the four transports which they had been trying to find through the night. They ran down close and veered to take station ahead and on the flanks, darting to and fro like greyhounds, cutting across the tall prows of the transports which seemed about to stamp them under. Bowman McMurray was at the flag locker and he craned his neck to stare up at the side of an enormous steamer. Along the rails were massed regiments of troops, gazing curiously at the destroyers, and Bowman heard one of his officers say:

"Part of a National Guard division. Four thousand men in that ship."

And now these doughboys began to sing. It may have been against orders in the submarine zone, but the chorus swelled spontaneously and welled from one end of the transport to the other. Deep and strong and true they sang:

"Oh, the sun shines bright on my old Kentucky home."

Bowman McMurray felt a lump in his throat.

He picked up a pair of binoculars to sweep those boyish, stern young faces, and the refrain rose and fell in long-drawn, poignant harmony.

"Weep no more, my lady, oh, weep no more to-day,
For I'll sing one song of my old Kentucky home.
Of my old Kentucky home far away!"

Upon a lofty upper deck stood a group of officers, and Bowman scanned them through the glasses. One burly figure and florid face seemed familiar and he looked again. It was Richard Stenton of Buford, beyond doubt. He moved forward to lean over the rail and the powerful glasses disclosed a captain's two bars on his shoulders. Bowman shouted and waved his white hat. The old hatred was forgotten. He had told Mike Brennan of those football days, and now he exclaimed:

"Remember the coach I told you was such a shyster when we played his high-school team? There he is yonder, right in front of that ventilator, on the bridge deck."

"A domned bad actor, ye told me," said Mike, "but he knows how to finish in style. 'Tis better to forgive the man an' wish him luck."

Bowman thought so, too. Presently Captain Richard Stenton was staring at the bridge of the destroyer through his own glasses and he recognized the stocky, black-haired bluejacket. This was evident, for he shouted something which the wind carried away, and flourished his cap several times. It was not a truce, but a reconciliation. As became a Stenton of Buford he was in command

of a company of tall Kentuckians. Bowman said to the old chief quartermaster:

"You can't always sometimes tell. I thought he was yellow, but I'm willing to bet he comes through, over yonder in the trenches."

"Bred as he is, 'tis like the honor of the service," replied the wise old veteran. "Good men an' bad, they pass it along, for it gets into the bone and the fibre of thim."

The destroyer laid a course from Brest to Queenstown after signaling farewell to the transport filled with Kentucky National Guardsmen. In the middle of the night a torpedo hit her, a pot shot fired by a roving German submarine with small hope of getting home on the target. Tenacious as she was, the destroyer seemed to fly into fragments. Almost instantly she sank in a vast bubble of steam and smoke. But even then men were trying to find their stations, methodically, without faltering.

Bowman McMurray was on watch when the destroyer went down. Faithfully he flashed a call for help with a blinker tube from a wing of the bridge until the forward part of the ship was lurching under. He was about to try to dive clear when old Mike Brennan stumbled against him. By some sort of miracle, the chief quartermaster had fought his way from the bunk below while other sleeping men had been trapped or blown to bits.

"She got it, me boy!" he bellowed.

"Let's go, Mike," said Bowman.

They had tarried too long, for the suction pulled

them down, and it was an agonized eternity before they came to the surface in a boiling eddy and feebly grasped a fragment of wreckage between them. Other castaways were shouting in the gloom, but they seemed to be moving farther away. A boat showed a flash, but Bowman failed to attract attention. He knew he could stay afloat many hours, for the water was not icy, but he feared for Mike Brennan. There was an unconquerable soul in the chief quartermaster, however, and he was tough and hairy and pickled in brine as a proper old sea-dog should be. Anxiously he asked, between chattering teeth:

"Are you hurted annywheres, me boy?"

"Only my foot, Mike. I cut it when we were pulled under, but it doesn't pain me much now. How about you?"

"I got a poke that caved in a rib or two, by the feel of it, but ye couldn't call me disabled. We'll carry on, Bowman. Will ye ballyhoo ag'in an' see if ye can raise anny one? We seem to be on detached duty."

The light of a boat flickered and winked afar off. There was nothing to do but hang on grimly and pray for daybreak. After a long silence Bowman said:

"Weren't you surprised, Mike, to see how well the crew behaved? It wasn't like going into action on the surface, with time to get braced for it."

"I wud ha' been surprised if this ship's company had done annything else," severely returned the old man. "But th' Navy is still new to ye."

Thus they floated and endured until soon after sunrise when a British destroyer came racing down to pick them up after rescuing the other survivors. Mike Brennan was alive, but he could not have been called sprightly. In fact he lay like a log in a warm bunk until the vessel moored in Queenstown Harbor and ambulances came down to the pier. Bowman McMurray was carried up the hill to the naval hospital and tucked in a cot beside Mike Brennan. The gash in his foot was wide and deep and he was unable to walk.

CHAPTER XVI

MIKE BRENNAN PASSES IT ALONG

A FORTNIGHT after the loss of the destroyer, Quartermaster McMurray, second class, was navigating the hospital corridor on a pair of crutches and fretting to get to sea again. Mike Brennan's ribs were mending nicely and he, too, was an unruly patient. The surgeons and the nurses tactfully kept it to themselves that both men would be unfit to rejoin the flotilla for the wild cruises offshore with the convoys. Their hurts were not serious, but the shock and exposure had sapped their vitality. The surgeon announced the verdict to the chief quartermaster.

"You ought to have easier duty, Mike, if you insist on active service again. A supply ship will be sailing for Norfolk in a few days and you can make a comfortable trip of it. This will buck you up, and then, if you like, you can report for duty with the Atlantic Fleet at the Yorktown base. What do you say?"

Mike Brennan pondered sadly before he replied.

"I'm not th' man I was, Doc. An' these destroyer infants might think I was underfoot. 'Tis a harrd service. What about McMurray?"

"I shall send him along with you. It would

break your foolish heart if I didn't, and he ought to recuperate."

Bowman was about to protest in vehement language, but he read the message in the chief quartermaster's wistful, puckered eyes, and thought better of it.

"You mean that I can join the Home Fleet, too?" he asked the surgeon.

"Certainly. Don't feel unhappy at leaving the flotilla. We are sending lads back all the time after six months of it. And they haven't been blown up and wounded. A man can stand only so much of this game."

The supply ship was as comfortable as a passenger steamer. Mike Brennan was invited to join the chief petty officers' mess and he took Bowman with him as a privileged guest. There was soothing relaxation in the freedom from routine watches, in the comfort of meals properly served and eaten without haste, in sleeping without being bucked out of a bunk or stood on one's head.

A few days at sea and Bowman was very much like himself. His injured foot had entirely healed and he walked the deck without discomfort. There was a slight imperfection in his gait,— it could scarcely be called a limp,— but he assumed that it would gradually disappear. When he stepped forward it seemed as though his foot let him down a trifle. He noticed it when he moved rapidly. Walking at a leisurely pace he was almost unconscious of it.

The ship was nearing the end of the voyage when he felt the first touch of anxiety concerning this curious little weakness, if it could be called such. He mentioned it to the ship's surgeon who made a careful examination.

"I noticed it several days ago," said the surgeon, "but I imagine it will cause you no serious trouble. Have you tried to run?"

"Yes, and I can't start and turn the way I used to. I'm a football player."

"Whew, that's unfortunate. It's your great toe —it should operate like a powerful spring every time you step. The tendon which controls it must have been cut or lacerated. As I say, it will never cripple you seriously, but—"

"But it will spoil me for fast work in football?" cried Bowman.

"Well, I am afraid you can't sprint and dodge very effectively. Where did you play?"

"Centre College, Kentucky," proudly answered McMurray.

"Never heard of it," said the surgeon, who was not at all athletic. For a dozen years he had led a drudging existence in the regular service and all bluejackets looked alike to him. His interest in this one was more professional than personal.

"Never mind about Centre College, then," said Bowman, who minded very much indeed. "Will this flat wheel of mine—the unlucky big toe, I mean —bar me from the service?"

"Oh, no. You are competent to perform duty

and there is a certain sympathy for a man wounded in action."

"Thank you, sir," steadily replied Quartermaster McMurray as he saluted and went on deck. He avoided Mike Brennan and wandered forward to fight it out with himself. The world had tumbled about his ears. He had expected to return to college some day and pick up his life where he had left it. The war was all-absorbing just now, but it was an interruption. Again and again, while aboard the destroyer, he had forgotten the hardships in bright pictures of that reunion on the campus, "Len" Garretson strolling in from France, "Red" Mercer probably a snappy artillery lieutenant or something, Duncan Fordney and Alfred Cottrell and Gentry and big Murdock all there together to build up the football team anew.

"Bo" McMurray could not imagine himself returning to college and unable to play football. It had been so intimately interwoven with his aspirations and endeavors that the whole fabric seemed to have been destroyed. And he was not in a state of mind to see the thing clearly. This was like another physical shock coming too soon after the loss of the destroyer. He brooded alone until Mike Brennan noticed his altered demeanor and was solicitous to find out what ailed the boy. There was no resisting the fatherly persuasions. The old man listened attentively, and few men could have understood it so well.

"This football was to you, Bowman, what th'

service has been to me," said he. "Colleges is strange waters to me, but I have liked the lads that came rushin' into this war. An' no doubt I wud not ha' been drawn to ye so strong but for what this football had already done to make a man of ye. 'Tis a sport to play at, an' yet the spirit is there to pass along."

"That is what I hoped to do, Mike, although I set a pretty bad example. I didn't know any better. What I wanted to do when I went back was to redeem myself. You know what I mean. I've learned to carry on."

"Ye can go back, me boy, but it will make you terrible unhappy, won't it? To stand an' look on is th' saddest thing that can come to a strong man."

"I ought not to quit college," exclaimed Bowman, "but you know how you would feel if you were chucked out of the service. You just couldn't be reconciled."

"Why don't you stay in th' service?" earnestly suggested Mike Brennan. "I have had it on me mind but you were tied hard an' fast to your college. Annyhow, I hoped an' prayed for it to come to pass. An officer an' a gentleman in the United States Navy need side-step for no man in God's world, Bowman."

"Right-o, Mike, and I am going to think it over. Perhaps that is really what I ought to do, and all the football and college was just sort of accidental."

This was making a brave effort to dissemble a tremendous disappointment. Before the ship

reached Hampton Roads, Bowman McMurray wrote several long letters and one of them was to Nancy Overton. What he said to her was this:

DEAR NAN:

I have waited for more than a year for some word from you, because an explanation was coming to me. It was about your telegram from Cincinnati, and when I got there you had suddenly sailed under sealed orders. It was the most mysterious thing in my whole career and it hurt my feelings terrifically. But I have decided to keep in mind what you told me years ago, that women are complex and so on, and chart my course accordingly. People can't afford to have private differences which hold them apart in these critical times that try men's souls. If our country doesn't pull together, for Heaven's sake, what will become of it?

What really made us misunderstand each other all through our youth, Nan, was your strange dislike of football. You raised the issue 'way back yonder when I had to lay aboard the three cops and you did Red Cross work on me. In spite of your curious antipathy for the finest game in the world, it was then and there that I fell in love with you. Yes, this is the first love letter I ever wrote, and the first shall be last, probably. There were reasons why I decided to step into the background in favor of another. But he has never seemed to think very much of my act of sacrifice. And I should say that the claim is outlawed.

I shall never play football again, Nan. I happened to be in a destroyer which went to the bottom in six minutes and those who got away were in a good deal of a hurry. I hurt my foot in the excitement and it will always be just a little bit lame: not limpy enough to make me carry a list, but I will have to cut down

my cruising speed. Now that it's all over, I do wish you could have seen me make one of my famous runs through a broken field for old Centre College. I was considered good. There is no harm in saying so, for I am a has-been. I shall probably stay in the Navy. I have enjoyed the life and it has been quite exciting at times. There is every encouragement for a worthy young fellow.

Football no longer looms between us, Nan, so I speak frankly. "Bo" McMurray was rated a hard little customer in Fort Hawley, but he hitched his wagon to a star and he has been coming strong ever since. You were the star, using a figure of speech, and it means that you shone serene and lovely for me through all the clouds and fogs of misunderstanding and everything. I don't know that I should call this letter a proposal, for the very idea might make you go up in the air. But a good woman should never feel indignant to learn that an honest man loves her beyond compare. Gone are the days when our hearts were young and gay, for war is very serious business, and we all have to get on with it. But in the meanwhile, by land and sea,

I am your friend of boyhood, and present and future servant in the bonds of true love,

BOWMAN MCMURRAY, Q.M.2c., U.S.N.

The young man seemed happier after this task was finished, and Mike Brennan's spirits therefore rose like a barometer forecasting fair weather. They left the ship together at the Norfolk Navy Yard and were sent to the war base of the Atlantic Fleet in Chesapeake Bay. There the mighty squadrons of battleships swung at anchor, gaining no glory, but schooling thousands of recruits to

meet the needs of a vastly expanded naval force. It was Mike Brennan's desire to be assigned to a destroyer. The work would not be so wearing as in the war zone, and the demand for seasoned chief petty officers was urgent.

It therefore befell that old Mike and Bowman McMurray were again in the kind of war vessel to which they were loyally devoted. It was a humdrum life until the Admiral commanding the Fleet issued orders for a week's manœuvres at sea. Out past the Capes ploughed the divisions of battleships, grim, enormous, while the seaplanes wheeled ahead, the submarines moved awash, and the destroyers and cruisers spread far in scouting formations.

At night the scores of ships were black shadows which showed no lights as they turned with faultless precision to the signals which sparked in the radio-room.

The Admiral sat at a table in his great cabin with the chief-of-staff and covered several sheets of paper with penciled diagrams.

"About this Battle Order Number Four," said the chief-of-staff; "when those destroyers attack through the kind of smoke screen you expect to lay down—"

"Some of them won't like it," cheerfully interrupted the Admiral. "It will be touch and go, by Jove. I see all that. But can you show me how to make an omelette without breaking eggs? The business of this Fleet is to operate under the conditions of war."

It was a windless day when the signal ran through the Fleet to prepare to execute Battle Order Number Four. The sea slept in a shimmering repose which extended to a horizon etched as fine as a silver thread. The battleship squadrons crept over this quiescent expanse in stately and majestic dignity, serene in the consciousness of their enormous power. Line after line of fretful destroyers hung on the flanks of the Fleet, flinging the seas from their sharp bows in white flashes of foam.

Soon the destroyers divided into two swiftly moving groups. One of these took stations to protect the battleships while the other made ready to drive home a concerted attack. Among these latter was the *Pemberton* destroyer. It seemed odd to Mike Brennan, vigilant, impassive as he stood beside the flag locker on the bridge, that the only men in the destroyer who had been through the punishing experience of the war zone were Bowman McMurray and himself. Bowman was at his elbow, ready for whatever might befall, like a good yew bow that feels the tension of the string. From the tail of his eye Mike glanced at the boy and was proud of his handiwork.

Until now the funnels of the destroyers had been showing scarcely a trace of smoke as the draft roared from the oil-burning furnaces. Presently, however, the protective divisions of destroyers which herded the ponderous battleships began to belch huge clouds of black, greasy vapor. It floated lazily and settled over this breathless, languid

ocean. The volume and extent of it were amazing to behold.

The destroyers hid themselves behind the infernal curtain of their own creation and continued to spread it as they steered on prearranged courses. The battleships were emitting from their squat funnels vast torrents of this black vapor. They were like craters in eruption. It mingled with the screen laid by the destroyers and enveloped them all. The sea was obscured by this sombre, stinking fog which was more opaque than night itself.

The commander of the *Pemberton* glanced at his wrist-watch and then at the other waiting destroyers which drifted to left and right of him, keeping clear of the smoke screen. He turned to his dapper, youthful executive, and Mike Brennan heard him say:

"Get set! We've got to run these courses to the second, and check the turns on the precise number of degrees, understand? I'll call the time and you watch the compass."

"Very well, sir. It is rather sporty."

"Sporty? Worse than that," growled the skipper. "If everything doesn't synchronize to a hair, somebody will be out of luck."

A gay bit of bunting climbed the flag hoist and the same signal fluttered from one destroyer after another. Like sprinters on the mark they broke forward to the slap of the sea against the thin steel plates and the hum of the whirling turbines. There was no gazing about to see what the others were

doing. The officers of the *Pemberton* were absorbed in their own particular problem. This division of destroyers was fast approaching the eddying, drifting black border of the smoke screen.

Before they plunged into it, the *Pemberton's* executive looked hard at the rosy young seaman who gripped the brass steering-wheel. The lad had suddenly lost color. The sweat streamed from under his canvas hat. Instead of holding his gaze unswervingly on the compass card in the binnacle, he was peering at the black vapor into which the vessel was about to drive. He was fearful because he could not understand. It was a nightmare to him, and the sense of his responsibility was an overwhelming burden.

The executive could read men and he had been trained to quick decisions. He turned to find another man to place at the wheel, and his eye fell upon Mike Brennan, unperturbed, as calm and stable as the everlasting hills. A glimpse of him was comforting. He fathomed the executive's instant need and nodded to show that he comprehended. With a smile the old man laid a hand upon Bowman McMurray's shoulder and shoved him toward the wheel.

The executive dragged the panic-smitten young helmsman aside. No sooner had his tremulous fingers released the spokes than Bowman McMurray held them in his strong grasp. Easy and alert, he guided the rushing destroyer as a skilled rider coaxes a spirited horse toward a break-neck jump. Fas-

tened against a bit of board was a diagram of Battle Order Number Four, with the times, distances, and courses. Bowman's quick vision swept it and he caught the purpose of the manœuvre. The executive watched him a moment and resumed his exacting duties. There was, indeed, a man at the wheel.

The *Pemberton* shot into the smoke screen and it closed around her. At the proper instant she would make a turn of forty degrees, right, and hold this altered course until she had passed beyond the smoke screen. The other destroyers of the group, invisible to each other, were to execute this same turning movement simultaneously. It was a tactical situation which might suddenly occur in battle. Obviously the deck of one of these speeding, blindfolded destroyers was no place for a nervous man.

The commander of the *Pemberton* counted off the seconds and ascertained that the engines were turning up precisely the correct number of revolutions to maintain the standard speed. So far, so good! There was no leeway for faulty calculations or errors in handling. The destroyer that veered out of her course was likely to crash into another one.

Bowman McMurray saw the commander throw up his hand. The executive snapped out the order. Forty degrees, right, it was! The *Pemberton* swung sharply as she felt the thrust of her rudder. Just then there loomed in the veiling smoke the murky shape of another destroyer, so close that her number, "71," could be read in the tall black figures on her

bow. She yawed wildly and was moving into the course of the *Pemberton* as though the steering-gear had jammed. Whatever the trouble, this menacing spectre of a "71" had blundered out of her own path and collision was imminent. On the *Pemberton's* bridge the officers stood rigid a frozen instant, and then the executive yelled:

"Hard left! No, she'll ram us amidships! Hard right!"

Bowman McMurray heard this conflicting order, but paid it no heed. He waited for the commander's word as the verdict to obey. Over his shoulder he flashed a smile at Mike Brennan whose gaze was proudly untroubled, conveying a confidence implicit and unshaken. Bowman steadied the wheel as he looked at the other destroyer which had to time to check headway to the drag of screws reversed.

The *Pemberton* was running her rightful course, true to a hair, as laid down in Battle Order Number Four. To change it was to throw the whole plan into confusion and endanger other destroyers obscured in this far-flung cloud of black vapor. And to endeavor to dodge collision, the instinctive thing to do, was to risk being rammed and sunk by this peril so close at hand.

The commander shouted: "Steady as she goes! Damn it, don't shift that helm!"

Bowman did not have to be told. He had no thought of flinching. In his face glowed an intensity of purpose which had no room for fear or

doubt. He held the *Pemberton* true and fair on her appointed course. The keen prow was aimed to strike the side of "71" far forward. The officers gripped the railing and tensely awaited a rending shock.

The impact was less violent than anticipated. It knocked men sprawling this way and that, but when they picked themselves up they saw the *Pemberton's* stem, moving with terrific momentum, shear like a knife through the fragile plates of the other destroyer. There was a clamor of twisting frames and beams as they buckled and broke while the *Pemberton* still forged ahead, cutting her way through the obstruction. As the tortured frames flew apart, the effect was like a series of explosions. Fragments of steel were hurled across the *Pemberton's* deck, and the men dropped flat to dodge this deadly débris.

Bowman McMurray stood erect at the wheel because it was his duty to stand there. He gazed down at the shattered forward deck of "71" and perceived that the *Pemberton* was biting her way clean through it. It was his inflexible purpose to hold her on her course. A piece of wreckage smashed an oak stanchion on the bridge while the two ships hung interlocked, and Mike Brennan leaped forward to stand in front of the man at the wheel. It was the instinct of parental protection which is stronger than the love of life. His boy was in danger and could not shield himself.

McMurray thrust out a hand to push Mike aside,

but the old man was immovable. A ragged bit of steel flew like a projectile from the broken deck beams of "71." It struck Mike Brennan as he stood with arm half upraised as though to ward off the missiles from the helmsman. The arm dropped, mangled and crushed, and the chief quartermaster of the *Pemberton* staggered slowly across the bridge to lean against the rail. Then the *Pemberton* moved clear as the last rivets snapped, and Bowman McMurray muttered in accents of profound awe:

"We cut old '71' in two for'ard, just like a piece of cheese, and we are still on our way. Could you beat it?"

They watched the crippled destroyer vanish in the smoke. She lacked a bow, but was still afloat.

"She will blow her siren if she needs assistance in a hurry," said the commander of the *Pemberton*, his manner slightly dazed. "A little thing like that ought not to sink her. What shape are we in, I wonder."

"Crumpled up like an old hat to the first bulkhead, but able to complete Battle Order Number Four," cheerfully sang out the executive who had been forward to investigate.

And now they discovered Chief Quartermaster Michael Brennan who had quietly sagged to the deck which was red with his own blood. He had no intention of distracting them from the proper handling of the ship. Bowman McMurray turned his head and perceived that the old man was

wounded and perhaps dying. The lad fought his emotions under and resumed his attentive study of the compass card. And this was as Mike would have had it.

They carried the chief quartermaster below and put him in the tiny room which served as a hospital. He was conscious, but very weak as he happily murmured to the surgeon:

"The boy was there, Doc! What did I tell ye?"

Then the chief quartermaster appeared to slumber while the *Pemberton* steered out of the smoke screen and into the blessed sunlight of the tranquil sea.

"Mike's arm will have to come off," said the surgeon to the commander. "I wish I could transfer him to the hospital ship for the operation. He would have a better chance for his life."

"I will signal at once," replied the skipper.

Before the signal was sent, a radio message came from the flagship in response to the brief report of the collision. It was signed by the commander-in-chief himself.

Well done, Pemberton. Bring Mike Brennan aboard if he can be moved.

The chief quartermaster came to himself in the spacious, immaculate hospital of the mighty super-dreadnought which flew the four-starred pennant. His misty gaze first descried the beloved figure of Bowman McMurray who sat beside the bed, and as in a very pleasant dream he heard the boy say:

"It was *you* that did it all, but, oh, Mike, I'm not worth the price you paid."

"An excellent bargain, me son, with value received," was the faintly uttered verdict.

The Admiral deferred his visit until the patient had gained a little strength. To see them together was to note a certain resemblance of aspect, far divergent though their careers had been. It was the stamp of the Navy, of character so deeply graven that its marks were manifest.

"What are your findings, sorr, touchin' on th' *Pemberton's* collision?" anxiously inquired the chief quartermaster.

"She was handled in a brilliant and satisfactory manner and is to be commended instead of blamed," said the Admiral; who added with a chuckle, "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, Mike, and this was a bully good one. The damage? Oh, nobody seriously hurt in '71.' You are the only damage that amounts to a tinker's dam."

"And the boy has your approval, sorr, for standin' the gaff? There's old hands that would ha' ducked it."

"He was splendid, and your skipper gives him the credit he deserves."

"Thank you kindly, sorr. I gave him me good right arm, but 'twas a small loss."

"Ah, Mike Brennan, you have given him a good deal more than that. This means the end of your active service, but you will still live and move in the Navy. It can't forget you."

"I am passin' it along. That is what I hoped to do," said the chief quartermaster.

CHAPTER XVII

TO AID A WORTHY YOUNG FELLOW

At eighteen, Nancy Overton was unspoiled after a three years' term of exile in a fashionable school which had a waiting list and cultivated the simple life. This was a pose, borrowed from the effete East, and was presumed to acquaint the daughters of the rich with the blessings of democracy and frugality as practiced by the common people. Nancy Overton thought it amusingly snobbish to try to imitate "plain folks," just as she had refused to be seriously impressed by her mother's ambition to create a smart set in Fort Hawley. It annoyed and disappointed Mrs. Overton to find that an education, so expensive and exclusive, had not improved her daughter's point of view. A clear-eyed child with a sense of humor is apt to be an inconvenience in many a modern household.

Barring this handicap, there was much to be said in Nancy's favor. For one thing, she was exceedingly pleasant to behold. Straight and supple, there was no trace of the awkward age in her easy, unhurried motions. She had the vigor of a healthy body and mind, but disliked wasteful exertion. Hers was a tranquil but not an indolent temperament. It was one of the charms which made her seem a trifle old-fashioned, almost

obsolete. The girls of her acquaintance were mostly nerves and restless yearnings and incessant chatter.

There was also a touch of quaintness in the manner of parting the heavy golden hair and brushing it smoothly back to the thick coil of braids. The blue of her eyes had deepened a little and their gaze was always frank and often mirthful. Her smile had this same quality, but a sensitive response to the pitiful things in life sometimes made it wistful. Nancy's friends in Fort Hawley were of all sorts and conditions, from childhood's playmates of the grammar-school lot to elderly negro hackmen who halted their bony steeds to tell her about their rheumatism or offer her a bunch of posies.

She had thought seriously of going to college, but the mention of it made poor mother wretchedly unhappy. Her one idea, the ruling passion, was that Nancy should be a belle. And while Nancy pondered the question and was reluctant to force the issue, the war altered her destiny among many million others. The Lord had given her something of her father's common sense and business ability, and it was not long before she was an efficient member of the Red Cross Committee and a leading spirit in the dances and other entertainments devised for the hordes of homesick soldiers who strayed in from the nearest Texas camps and cantonments.

The time came, however, when her own affairs

required attention, even if it did mean neglecting the war. Into the pocket of her trim khaki skirt she tucked a letter which was re-read again and again as she drove about in her own car, between offices and headquarters and work-rooms. It was a letter which seemed the more difficult to answer, the longer she delayed. And the fact that Quartermaster Bowman McMurray, U.S.N., had given no clue to his whereabouts made the problem even more abstruse.

As a love-letter, which it professed to be, Nancy was puzzled to define it as a proposal, a confession, or a farewell. The McMurray possessed shining virtues, but he was not always logical. What stirred her sympathy to the depths was his disclosure that he would always "be a little bit lame" and could never play football again. Just a few words, with none of Bowman's fatal fondness for melodrama in big moments, but the very repression increased the pathos of it. Nancy was unreconciled. It haunted her days and nights until she sought a confidant.

This friend was Sallie Caldwell. Fayette was flying a fighting plane somewhere in France. In her war garden back of the house Sallie was spraying potatoes while the incomparable offspring, "Scooch," now a sturdy mite of an urchin in a little khaki uniform, was aiming a wooden gun at the mocking-birds and yelling, "Bang." Fayette's wife seemed no older. She was still a girl, slim and brown and vivacious. Nancy regarded

her as an adopted sister and was unconscious of the disparity of half a dozen years.

They found a seat in the shade of a magnolia where Nancy fanned her flushed cheek with a big straw hat. Seizing the opportunity the energetic "Scooch" was about to quench his thirst with the Paris green solution in the watering-pot, but his mother rushed to the rescue and bore him kicking into the house. This tragedy averted, the breathless Sallie exclaimed:

"I surely do miss Bo McMurray when it comes to taking care of that angel child. They were a born pair of buddies."

"Sallie, dear, I came on purpose to talk about Bowman," said Nancy, with her usual candor. "Has he written you lately?"

"He wrote a long letter to Fayette, honey, and I read it before I forwarded it. He said he had been detached from overseas duty and would be somewhere on the Atlantic coast. I'm worried about that boy."

"So am I," agreed Nancy. "He didn't even tell me that much. What did he say about being lame?"

"Something went wrong with a tendon in his foot. It was badly gashed, but healed nicely. And then he discovered this permanent trouble."

Nancy's eyes were misty, but there was a new hope in her voice as she exclaimed:

"I just couldn't accept it! Something told me there might be a way to help him. Why, I have

been hearing perfectly wonderful things about surgery. I went to Dallas for Colonel Boynton's series of Red Cross lectures, Sallie."

"But poor Bowman must have had the best of care," said Sallie Caldwell.

"They patched him up and sent him back to the Navy!" flamed Nancy. "Perhaps there was no first-class surgeon there. Oh, they did their best, but who was Bowman McMurray to them? Merely one sailor boy among thousands."

"I feel thankful to know he is alive and well."

"So do I. But I know that tendons can be repaired and spliced and all sorts of things," declared Nancy. "Colonel Boynton said so, and it's all in my notebook."

"Then something ought to be done about it. Nancy, child, you're taking a mighty sight of interest in this case—as if this boy belonged to *you*. I reckon he wrote you more than he did Fayette. Was it a love-letter?"

"Perhaps; but this is really Red Cross work," said Nancy, with a twinkle.

"How delicious! Romance perished when Fayette flew off to war."

Nancy mused before resuming:

"Bowman's only consolation seems to be that football no longer stands between us. As if I had ever dreamed of discouraging it. It has meant everything fine and noble to him."

"Fayette understood that better than any one

else," replied Sallie. "Bowman ought to go back to college, of course, but—"

"But he never will, as things are now. He is too sensitive. That boy is a poet who writes in deeds instead of words. It makes him a little trying to keep up with."

"Supposing you were in love with *him*, Nan. What then?"

"'Tent'ively'?" calmly answered Nancy, although her lovely color was a bit more vivid. "The war has taught me not to feel surprised at anything. Three years more of college and wouldn't you or anybody else be proud of Bowman McMurray? Think what he has done already! Fort Hawley opinion? It's ridiculous to pay any attention to that gabble!"

"Still tent'ively, Nan, your mother has ideas of her own, and she—"

"Mother? Pooh!" cried Nancy. "And who were the Overtons until dad made some money in cattle and then ran it up in lucky oil leases and Fort Hawley real estate? We were just ordinary, decent Texas folks."

"I never did hear you go on like this!" delightedly exclaimed Sallie. "Rave some more."

"Why, I thought you'd be shocked, Sallie Barbee that was, who married a Blue-Grass Caldwell. Now we pause to consider the McMurrays. You know what the war has done for that family. Tom McMurray is a wonderful mechanic, and he invented a shrapnel fuse which times a shell to

explode with almost human intelligence. Tom let the Government make its own contract—you can't imagine him profiteering—and the new factory is running night and day shifts."

"I didn't know all that," said Sallie. "Money will never spoil Tom. He is too much like Bowman."

"It won't have a chance if he keeps on giving it away to the Red Cross and the French orphans and every other war fund—"

"His wife deserved all the good luck there is," interrupted Sallie.

"People are getting to know her," said Nan. "Isn't she a dear? Has any woman in town more gracious manners? It has done Fort Hawley a lot of good to be shaken together by the war. And since Bowman's folks moved into the new house on the Parkway, mother's friends have actually begun calling on her."

"But what about Bo?"

"I propose to find the boy, Sallie, and let him know his friends haven't forsaken him. I don't intend to let him go limping through life if anything can be done to help him. The stunt is to get him out of the Navy."

"But he may want to stay in, Nancy."

"Nonsense! He is trying to make the best of it. You wouldn't expect him to whine. He sees his college career smashed and he takes it smiling, just the way he always played football."

"I wish we had Fayette here to help us. Have you talked to Tom McMurray?"

"Not yet, but soon. As a parent, he ought to be consulted."

"What we seem to need is a friend in the Navy Department," observed Sallie. "Bowman has some fine friends in Kentucky, some of them Fayette's kinfolk. See here, Nancy Overton, do you know who Fayette would turn to? Colonel Harris Shelby, of Somersworth. He has been the most influential Democrat in the Blue-Grass country for years and years, and I reckon he'd know how to get to the Secretary of the Navy. But that's not all. Colonel Shelby knows Bowman mighty well and fairly dotes on him."

"You're quite sure he would understand my friendly interest in a poor, unfortunate sailor boy?"

"He couldn't mistake it for anything but the devotion of a Red Cross sister," was Sallie's solemn assurance.

"Thank you. I think I'll go and see Tom McMurray."

Nancy vanished from the garden, and Mrs. Fayette Caldwell resumed the patriotic campaign against the alien potato bugs which were doubtless made in Germany. The innocent "Scooch" emerged from captivity and went over the top with his little wooden gun.

Thomas McMurray sat at a large, flat-topped desk in an office where clicked a battery of typewriters. Clean-shaven, brawny, and black-browed, he had discarded the overalls for a well-cut business suit, but he was always ready to jump into them

at a moment's notice if there was trouble in the new munition plant with its hundreds of men and women artisans and long aisles of machines. He glanced up from a sheaf of blue-prints, and his smile was so like his boy's, respectful and winsome, that Nancy's heart fluttered.

He left his chair and advanced to meet her, moving with a certain grace for all his bulk, and exclaimed as they shook hands:

"Please come in, Miss Overton. Shall I show you through the shops? The day is brighter for a glimpse of you."

"That is blarney. All McMurrays talk it," replied Nancy. "May I sit down in a quiet corner with you? It is about Bowman."

"God bless you, come into the little room away from this racket."

For all Nancy's composed demeanor, her cheek burned and her speech was a little hurried as she explained her errand. Tom McMurray's manner gave no indication that he considered the situation at all awkward. With ready tact he suggested:

"It's your kind heart that would have the boy cured of this lameness of his."

"Bowman and I are very old friends, Mr. McMurray, and I thought that perhaps this hope of mending him hadn't occurred to you. It was mere luck that I happened to hear some lectures on surgery a little while ago."

"Call it luck, or something else," smiled Tom. "It's for me to start out and find the boy. But

how can I leave this shop? My duty is to be on the job."

"You can't look after him. I see that," agreed Nancy. "You have to get on with the war. And who else is there but me? I mean, who else is there that cares as much as we do?"

He took her hand between his hard palms and held it as he said: "For his mother's sake I call it very beautiful of you, Miss Overton. If it is money, or anything else in my power—"

"I will consult you about that later," said she. "Meanwhile let me do my bit for Bowman."

"Have you advised with your own folks?" he asked.

"Mother is in Dallas at a Food Conservation Convention, and you know where dad is, rambling all over the county as chairman of the Liberty Loan drive."

On the third day following this interview, Colonel Harris Shelby walked to the post-office as was his daily habit after breakfast when the weather was fine. His progress was slow and stately, with frequent pauses to chat with his friends and neighbors of Somersworth. As years go, he was an aged man well past seventy, but the gaunt frame was still erect and there was no hint of mental decline in the masterful countenance so time-worn and venerable. As careful of his dress as of his deportment, he liked the frock coat, the black string tie, and the waistcoat cut low enough to show a snowy shirt-front of pleated cambric.

In this his taste was shared by the judge of the circuit court. Together they conferred upon the town a priceless dignity.

With an eye which had not grown dim to youth and beauty, Colonel Shelby halted his promenade to observe a fair-haired girl with a rose-leaf complexion who stood in front of the hotel and appeared to be asking information of the negro driver of the battered flivver which served as a taxi. While he lingered, the driver caught sight of him and exclaimed:

"Yondah he, ma'am, Cunnel Shelby hisself! What sense in me totin' you out to his house wh'ar he ain't?"

Baring his white head, the first citizen of Somersworth advanced to say:

"If I am so fortunate as to be the object of yo' quest, Miss—"

"Why, of course you are Colonel Shelby!" cried the girl with a smile so radiant that his subjugation was complete. "You couldn't be any one else, after what Sallie Caldwell told me about you. My name is Nancy Overton, all the way from Fort Hawley, Texas."

"No wonder Fayette Caldwell lost his heart in Texas," said the Colonel, twisting an end of his white moustache in a manner almost jaunty. "I have heard of Miss Nancy Overton. The son of yo' No'thern Presbyterian clergyman ran himself plumb out of adjectives."

"Red Mercer?" laughed Nancy. "Did you

play chess with him? And did the Garretson kid entice you into stud-poker, or has he stayed reformed?"

"Football was the only game they lured me into," beamed Colonel Shelby, "and they made a hell-roarin' fanatic of me. Here I am behavin' like a dunce. Will you pardon me while I 'phone for my car? We can wait in the hotel parlor."

"But I never intended to visit you, sir. I had a feeling that you were the one person for me to see and—"

"And this totterin' old person gives thanks to a benevolent Providence," said her host. "As for my wife, you will be sunshine and spring-time. If you will permit me to attend to yo' luggage—"

Nancy accepted with a sense of happy security. Her pilgrimage had ceased to be quixotic. It was the most natural thing in the world to be in the kindly care of Colonel Harris Shelby, who offered his arm as they entered the hotel. Soon they were in a limousine which climbed a hill at the edge of the town and swept between tall brick gate-posts into a curving driveway. It was a modern house, but wide and plain and comfortable. Colored servants were numerous, and most of them were elderly men and women who had been born and raised in the cabins of the Shelby farm a few miles beyond Somersworth.

Nancy did not meet the lady of the house until later in the day when she was invited into an upper sitting-room. "Miss' Ella," as the Colonel called

his beloved wife, was in a wheel chair, an old woman worn and wasted, but as beautiful in his sight as when he had wooed and won her in the flower of girlhood. This was manifest by the way he looked at her, by the tones of his voice, by the little attentions which were those of the cavalier. Her eyes were the windows of a soul unbroken and courageous. They were very dark and strangely youthful, with naught of that shadowy sadness which so often betokens the end of the passage. Nancy leaned over to kiss her and the fragile fingers caressed the girl's damask cheek.

"My husband has told me your errand, Nancy," said she, in a voice still musical. "Has he told you of another girl—it happened years and years ago—"

"I was hurt in a war, Nancy," the Colonel broke in to explain. "It's a heap easier to reach Washington now than when we tried it by way of Gettysburg. A girl no older than you rode all by herself over the mountains into Virginia to find me. And if she hadn't stayed and nursed me, I'd be there yet! Sorry you did it, Miss' Ella?"

"No, Harry. This time you won't be so long on the road to Washington."

"But I never dreamed of asking the Colonel to go to Washington," protested Nancy. "I am perfectly willing to go on by myself if I know what to do."

"I shall enjoy undertakin' this mission," said he. "In fact, I insist. The bargain is that you shall keep Miss' Ella company until I return."

Colonel Shelby looked the intrepid old cavalryman as he stood with folded arms and defied objections.

Nancy meekly surrendered, afraid of a court-martial. She dared to ask:

"If you obtain an honorable discharge for Bowman, on the ground of disability, as you suggested to-day, are we sure he will want to accept it before the end of the war?"

"Now you have hit the problem right slam on the nose," declaimed the Colonel. "I know that fool boy, and I reckon you know him better. He is full of unreasonable and unexpected kinks, which is why we all love him. Every day he stays on a ship may make it a worse bet that his lameness can be cured. But can we beat it into his head? My plan is for me to dig him out, wherever he is, and talk it over as man to man."

"But that's too much to ask of you, Colonel Shelby. I—I might talk to him myself, but—"

"But there's such a thing as getting too much romance mixed into this affair. You don't want the boy to do a thing just because you ask it, and then be sorry afterwards."

"Yes, that might happen," agreed Nancy; who added with a rueful expression, "And he has an extraordinary notion that life is one misunderstanding after another, as far as I am concerned. He used to stalk out, grand and gloomy."

"Harry was difficult, in much the same way," spoke up Miss' Ella from among the pillows of her chair. "The remedy is to marry them, Nancy."

"But this has nothing to do with marrying Bowman McMurray," declared young Miss Overton, in positive accents. "I hate to disappoint you, but the idea that a love-affair brought me all the way up here from Texas is all wrong, of course."

The two old people gazed wisely at Nancy and shook their heads. The Colonel coughed and spoke up briskly.

"I shall leave for Washington to-morrow. And God help any triflin' understrapper that gets between me and the Secretary of the Navy. In case I happen to continue my journey, Nancy, and meet up with that young rascal of a Bo McMurray, is there any message to take him?"

Nancy considered gravely before she answered, with a smile both tender and mirthful:

"Tell him I want him to play football again, so nothing will stand between us, and—let me see—you might say he will be a worthy young fellow some day, if he keeps on."

CHAPTER XVIII

COLONEL SHELBY UNDERTAKES A MISSION

Quartermaster Bowman McMurray, U.S.N., was down-hearted. After the collision at sea, the crumpled destroyer *Pemberton* had proceeded to Norfolk under her own steam and was placed in drydock at the Navy Yard. During the tedious repair job there was all the shore liberty that the most sociable bluejacket could desire. Bowman joined one or two festive dinner parties and then dropped out, nor did he find enjoyment in the dances at the Navy Y.M.C.A. hut. He was conscious of his slight lameness and he found that dancing tired him. He began to fear that his foot had suffered an extra strain at the time of the collision when he had braced himself so firmly to steady the wheel.

He sorely missed the companionship of old Mike Brennan who was in a naval hospital overlooking Hampton Roads. The veteran chief quartermaster, who had toughly survived so many other vicissitudes, was recovering from the shock of losing his good right arm. Not condemned as a worn-out hulk, but struck down in action, he had quitted the service in proper style as became a man of the old Navy. With his savings and his retired pay, he was comfortably provided for,

and he intended to have a cottage and a garden where he could watch the warships steam past the red channel buoys in the storied waters of Hampton Roads.

McMurray was loafing on the *Pemberton's* deck when his attention was caught by what seemed like an apparition. Approaching the drydock was a stately, venerable gentleman who wore a frock coat and a soft black hat. He paused to gaze about him with an air of lively interest and raised his hand to salute two or three young officers who hurried by him. It was his tribute to the uniform. Bowman McMurray rubbed his eyes and continued to stare. Then, as Colonel Shelby drew near the destroyer's gangway, he ran to escort him aboard.

The first citizen of Somersworth, Kentucky, was thrilled with emotion. The Navy was unfamiliar to him, and it was a memorable experience to tread the deck of a destroyer.

"Howdy, boy!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Glad to find you in a regular fightin' ship. She looks devilish wicked to me. What's the matter with her front end? It's all stove up."

"Nothing much, Colonel. We bumped another one. Did you really want to see me enough to come ramblin' down to this old Navy Yard?"

"I was prepared to chase you till my wind gave out," chuckled Colonel Shelby. "This was easier than I reckoned. And that genial gentleman from No'th Carolina, the Secretary of the Navy, who

has been most infernally maligned, placed himself at my service. When I had concluded my remarks, you would have thought Bo McMurray was a brass-bound admiral. I had 'em scurryin' around, boy."

"For Heaven's sake, Colonel, what's the answer?" implored the dazed McMurray. "Do you mind sitting on deck? I can't ask you below, for you can't swing a kitten by the tail anywhere in a destroyer."

"I'd like to poke around after a while, Bo, if you don't think I'm too brittle. And you will dine with me in Norfolk. Now tell me, what's this about a damaged foot? As an old friend, I feel a natural interest."

"Where did you hear about it?" demanded Bowman.

"From your Texas folks. They know me as a pesterin' old grand-daddy. And as I'm looking forward to seein' you tear loose again for Centre College, I want to know."

"That is a closed chapter of my life, gone but not forgotten," declared the McMurray. "I shall always treasure my memories of good Old Centre, and in years to come—"

"I heard you spout one after-dinner speech," rudely spoke the Colonel. "Don't practice another one on me. You still run true to form. What I have to say is that the papers are made out releasin' you from Uncle Sam's Navy, subject to a final medical examination. The question is—

are you liable to buck over the traces? This is no kidnappin' expedition."

"Release me for what? Why should I duck the service?"

"To give you the best surgical treatment that money can buy, if there's a ghost of a show to get you trottin' square again. I consulted an eminent surgeon in Washington and he advised this procedure, Bo. If there is any point of honah involved, please permit me to discuss it with you. In such matters, my notions are known to be scrupulous."

Bowman was bewildered. Gratitude swelled uppermost. Was there ever a boy with friends so true and who deserved them less? he said to himself. Yes, a point of honor was involved, a binding obligation personal and sacred. After painful reflection, he said:

"I don't have to tell you, Colonel Shelby, how it stood me on my beam ends to give up football and college and everything. Maybe I'll have more sense after a while and want to go back to college anyhow, with football cut out. But I can't see it yet. I am that kind of a fool. As for leaving the Navy flat on its back, that doesn't worry me so much. I've put in more than a year of sea service, most of it in foreign waters, and before long they will be shifting me to a desk job ashore. I've lost my punch."

"Then what troubles you, boy?" gently asked the Colonel, who perceived that some issue more vital was at stake.

"If you'll go to the Naval Hospital with me to see old Mike Brennan, I reckon you can understand. The ferry doesn't run right to make it this afternoon. If we had a launch—"

"Let me ask the commandant of the Navy Yard for a boat," said the Colonel. "My credentials are good enough to grab anything short of a battleship."

It was soon arranged, and, as the launch moved down the harbor, Bowman told his friend the story of Chief Quartermaster Michael Brennan and his self-abnegation. When they reached the wharf and climbed to the long hospital building, they found old Mike sitting in the sunshine on a piazza, with an empty sleeve pinned to his double-breasted blue coat. It was the first day he had been permitted to put on his uniform, and, crippled though he was, the aspect of enduring solidity was impressive.

No introduction was needed to convey to him that Colonel Harris Shelby was a man of his own kind and kin. The sympathy was instant and unspoken. The Colonel uncovered his white head as he grasped the corded hand of the old sailor, with the ensign tattooed on the hairy back of it. Carefully the Kentucky gentleman made clear the motive of his mission while Bowman McMurray listened and looked on. It was manifest that the decision lay with these two elderly men whose long lives had taught them that above all else honor was to be greatly preferred. There came a

silence during which Mike Brennan gazed at the wide expanse of Hampton Roads and a lone destroyer moving swiftly out to sea while her flag-hoist fluttered a fare-ye-well. From the deck of an anchored battleship floated the music of a band that played "The Long, Long Trail."

"You see exactly how it is, Colonel Shelby," said Bowman, recalled from a reverie. "Mike Brennan paid the price so I could pass it along. He kept the torch lighted. And as long as he wants me to stay in the service, I'm there! There isn't anything else. I realized that as soon as I saw what had happened to him, when they picked him off the deck of the *Pemberton* with his arm mashed to a bloody pulp."

"No, me son, 'twas not th' intintion to put shackles on ye," replied the chief quartermaster. "I had ambitions, that's true enough, and the good of the service is th' breath of life to me. But I would ha' tried to shield you from harm that day aboard th' *Pemberton* if your enlistment had been due to run out tin minutes later."

"I never looked at it that you wanted to tie me to the service against my will, Mike," cried Bowman. "It's a debt that I'm glad and proud to pay. All I told Colonel Shelby was that if my lameness should bar me from sea duty, I might be better off and more useful doing something else. It is for you to say."

"Bowman is entirely correct, Mr. Brennan," said Colonel Shelby. "It is for you to say. I am

requesting nothing in his behalf. And permit me to assure you of my profound respect and admiration. I have learned more about the American Navy from you than from all the dashed volumes of history ever written."

"While they had me hauled out in this hospital," deliberately explained Mike Brennan, "I laid a-thinkin'. Far back I wint in me mind to th' days whin I was a two-fisted lad like this young bucko. He has been patient with me, has Bowman, more patient than I was with old men's fancies. He has told me much about his college, Colonel Shelby, an' how he wint there, as a true man follows the flag of his service. An' the more I laid a-thinkin', the more I mistrusted was I right. Was it steerin' th' boy off his course to try to keep him in the Navy? Will he not be passin' it along on his college campus, same as he would on deck? He has a strong influence amongst th' football lads an' thim that is so unfortunate as to be studyin' books. Could he not be payin' th' debt, if ye will call it such? All I ask of the boy is to remember th' good he has learned from old Mike Brennan, and forgit me failin's."

Bowman could not bring himself to believe that his shipmate had really surrendered the fond aspirations which had glowed like a beacon light. The boy interpreted it as another sacrifice and was reluctant to accept it. But Colonel Shelby comprehended with a truer insight. Like as a father

pitieth his children was the motive in Mike Brennan's heart of hearts.

"It would be wrong for me to try to persuade you in any way," said the Colonel to the chief quartermaster. "It may make you feel happier if I tell you about Centre College and this boy, from my own point of view."

Bowman left them together and wandered down to the wharf in front of the hospital. Already his eventful career in the Navy seemed like the fragments of a dream, the wild offshore cruises out of Queenstown to meet the troop convoys, the tragedy of the shattered destroyer which had drowned his comrades by the score, and the manœuvres of the Home Fleet when he had stood the test in the choking smoke screen and learned how to carry on. Among these episodes moved one figure, steadfast, abiding, whose image would never be dimmed. He would not lose sight of Mike Brennan.

When Bowman rejoined his two friends on the hospital piazza, Colonel Shelby was saying:

"Just as soon as they will let you travel, Mike Brennan, I'll be expectin' you for a month in Somersworth. I want to show the Blue-Grass folks *a man.* I'll say nothin' about my old nigger who will toddle around after you with a mint julep that—"

"He won't be toddlin' far," grinned the man-of-war's man. "Thank you kindly, Colonel. There's lots of things you an' me would find it agreeable to yarn about betwixt the two of us."

"And you'll come to see Centre College play football some day, when the team gets going again," eagerly cried Bowman.

"Aye, son, an' I pray God ye'll be in the thick of it. 'Tis better so."

"I'll see you again to-morrow, Mike. I don't feel like talking things over just now. It sort of chokes me up. We had some grand old cruises together, 'specially in foreign waters. And when you break out one of those Kentucky mint juleps, Mike, drink one to the old Flotilla. She was good!"

Mike nodded, but his firm old lips were trembling and he could find nothing to say. Bravely he returned the farewell salute of Colonel Harris Shelby. Bowman went down to the launch with dragging step. He did not turn to look back until the boat was out in the stream. The chief quartermaster was standing at the edge of the piazza, shading his eyes with his hand as he gazed after them. Bowman waved his cap.

The Colonel said to him:

"Life is streaked with sadness, boy, and darkened with regrets, no matter how manfully you play it. You're learnin' young."

"But think of the friends I've had to help me to learn how to play it well," fervently replied Bowman. "Nobody ever had so much to live up to, or so many debts to square."

"That reminds me, Bo. I have a message for you. I wrote it down. Here, I'll tear the leaf out of my notebook."

The Colonel said nothing about Nancy Overton's pilgrimage from Texas. This was for her to reveal. Bowman read the few lines in the Colonel's shaky scrawl and repeated aloud:

Tell him I want him to play football again . . . he will be a worthy young fellow some day, if he keeps on . . .

"Did she actually give you this message, Colonel Shelby, with her own fair hands?"

"No, you young lunatic. She dictated it, as you might say. I refuse to incriminate myself by answerin' any more fool questions."

"*She* sent me a message like that, and it wasn't another phantom telegram?" murmured Bowman, in accents of awe. "And here's a man who has *seen* her. Listen, Colonel! I was never more sensible in my whole life. Do you realize what it means? Another responsibility to live up to. That I will be 'a worthy young fellow some day,' if I keep on is highly significant."

"It is, if you make good," was the Colonel's dry comment. "I should call it a highly conditional statement."

"But how can I fail, with this encouragement, on top of everything else? It may take years and years. Prob'ly it will. But you can just bet I'll bear watching."

"Ah, youth, youth!" sighed the Colonel, half aloud. "The way of a man with a maid. And Mike Brennan in the background so soon."

"What's that, suh?" asked the absent-minded McMurray.

"Nothing worth while, boy. Merely an old man's maunderin' reflections."

CHAPTER XIX

BEYOND THE ALPS LIES ITALY!

In the locker-room of the gymnasium at Centre College the football men were putting on the faded jerseys and the dingy, padded breeches. The Great War had been an interruption. The young men who had been in the service told their stories to each other and soon tired of it. As heroes their fame was fleeting. Most people were anxious to forget there had been a war. For a time they had been moved to think of something else than their own little selfish interests. They had been a nation truly united in a noble purpose, but the strain was too great.

Surgery had made Bowman McMurray whole again. There had been suffering and long idleness, but his feet were nimble to dash through a swaying rush-line or dodge past the floundering backs. And he honestly believed that his strength had been restored in order that he might redeem his pledge to a grizzled chief quartermaster with an empty sleeve.

They sat upon the benches in the locker-room, chewing gum and lacing the cleated shoes. There were new faces in the group, but half a dozen others had played together before. "Len" Garretson seemed a little taller, leaner, and lazier.

When he pulled off his shirt, one saw the red scar of a bayonet wound. In a drawer of his bureau, lost in a jumble of collars and ties, was the medal of the Croix de Guerre. When he referred to the war, it was to call it a mess. John Calvin Mercer, Junior, had acquired a snappy manner and was inclined to be dictatorial. His morbid taste for mathematics had won him a second lieutenant's commission in the Ordnance Department and he had waged a fierce campaign of formulæ and diagrams from a desk in Washington.

Duncan Fordney and Alfred Cottrell, also brothers in the bonds, had remained in the students' training corps of the college, while young Gentry, the half-back, had gone home to help his father raise more wheat and fat cattle. Perley Kemp, that sturdy captain of the Centre eleven, slept where the poppies blow in France. Prophetic had been the McMurray's eulogy:

These are the men to tie to, and they have made Kentucky famous. On many a dark an' bloody ground you have seen Perley Kemp plug ahead with the ball, and even if he was slow in starting and didn't gain much distance, a stout heart beat beneath that ragged jersey.

Andy Swope had come back to coach for another season, and, although he never boasted, nothing would have surprised him more than to see this team defeated. His veteran players were no longer freshmen in any sense of the word. And his management had ceased to be an experiment. He had the loyal support of the campus

which had almost doubled its student population. Success on the football field had already attracted attention to little Centre. It promised to be not only scholarly, but famous. The increased attendance meant better football material for the masterful tutelage of Andy Swope, with more than two hundred students from which to recruit the squad. He had arranged a more arduous schedule of contests, against antagonists of tougher metal than ever before, and found that "the praying Kentuckians" received respectful consideration.

To see them at practice was to perceive that the eleven had become more smoothly coördinated, more consistently powerful. It possessed its own peculiar fire and eagerness, but this was welded into the ideal of *the team.* It had been a doctrine, faithfully preached by Fayette Caldwell, hammered at by Andy Swope, breathed in the very air of the campus, but now it was a living essence. Bowman McMurray had been made captain of the eleven, and to his influence was partly due this realization that no man could live unto himself, even in football.

Andy Swope had been filled with forebodings. McMurray could never be made to obey. He was brilliant and unreliable. Bowman knew all this, and that the coach had sworn "to make him or break him." And it was amusing to watch the wonderment of Andy Swope when he discovered that he had been borrowing a vast amount of trouble. What he first noticed was that McMurray

stood at attention whenever he addressed him on the field. It was not a pose, but the reflection of a state of mind. And whether it was an order, a suggestion, or a biting criticism, Bowman rapped out, "Yes, Mr. Swope," or, "Aye, aye, suh." And he smiled when he said it, the smile of cheerful subordination. When in action there was no erratic disregard of policies or instructions. This was true leadership.

"Len" Garretson was gratified, but not astonished. He knew what had happened to the impetuous McMurray because a like experience had been granted him. These two were idling out-of-doors one evening while a crowd of their classmates sang old plantation melodies on the steps of a college building. It was unusual for Garretson to mention the war, but something moved him to say:

"It sunk deep into you, Bo. Some men never got it at all. I was a sergeant in a company that never did lose sight of it. Maybe that's why there wasn't enough of 'em left to make a football team."

"Honest, Len? Were they shot up as bad as that?"

"Nine of the old outfit landed in Hoboken after the war quit on us."

"And you are passin' it along," said Bowman. "Did the idea of comin' back here seem kind of triflin' to you, like small-boy stuff?"

"No, it never did. I heard buddies talk that

way,—no more college for them,—but it looked like we had left a job unfinished here at Centre. And another thing was that I felt curious to watch whether you'd blow up, Bo. There used to be times when I was shaky about you."

"I understand. I must have been an exasperatin' object for all hands. But there's many a brand snatched from the burning. Also knock on wood. Here's a funny thing. Have you noticed it? A little brief authority went to Red Mercer's head. He has strutty symptoms now and then,—not on the football field, for I don't allow that,—but in the bosom of our happy home."

"He was a second lieutenant, was our freckled old Cube-Root," replied Garretson, as though that explained it all. "It's a disagreeable little disease, like chicken-pox, but it generally wears off. If it doesn't I'll knock it off."

"We all have our failings, 'specially me," loyally exclaimed Bowman. "Things are all different, somehow."

"*We're* different, Bo. It's a good many years since I was a boy. That's how I feel sometimes."

"Same here! I am dead serious about football and matrimony and other vital problems of life."

"Matrimony, did you say?" drawled the Garretson kid.

"A figure of speech, Len, old man," was the hasty answer. "I'm merely peerin' into the future."

"Don't strain your eyesight. The big idea is to tackle low and follow the ball."

This was superfluous advice. Day after day the Centre eleven was gaining speed, confidence, solidarity. The season swiftly swung into the programme of games which were to show whether the sensational prestige was a lucky accident or a habit. The eleven met its adversaries and mowed them down. It had been said that under modern rules and conditions it was no longer possible to roll up large scores against a well-drilled defensive. The science of football had become stabilized. Captain "Bo" McMurray's men tossed this dictum into the discard. They were playing out of their class, against colleges and universities presumed to overshadow little Centre in every respect, and yet they swept from one victory to another like a hurricane. It was an achievement unique in the annals of American sport. Nine games they played in all, and their score of points reached the astounding total of 476 to a beggarly 9 points for their routed opponents.

One contest, above all others, was memorable because of its sequel. In the mountains of West Virginia, at the State University, was a mighty squad of gladiators whom so puissant an authority as Walter Camp had dubbed the "team of the season." This he proclaimed after these stalwarts had thrashed none other than the Princeton Tigers by the score of 25–0. In the opinion of the sagacious Mr. Camp, this was a deed of greater merit than all that Centre College had performed.

"We've *got* to show them," said Bowman Mc-

Murray to Andy Swope. "This is the first chance we ever had to get a line on what we could do against one of the big Eastern colleges. Beyond the Alps lies Italy, and Harvard."

"Your aims are lofty, and you're afflicted with imagination as usual," replied the coach who had umpired many a League game in Boston. "You whip these West Virginia moonshiners and Harvard may condescend to notice your existence. If you asked right now for a game next year, they might take it as an insult."

"I reckon Harvard is an unfortunate mental attitude," observed Bowman. "Does it wear off in after life, like being a second lieutenant?"

"If they get out into the United States it does, Bo, but not if they stay in Boston. Of course they know who Princeton is. The wilderness begins west of New Jersey, but as for queer little colleges like us, 'way out in No Man's Land, they'd be liable to ask if we graduated barbers, stenographers, or banjo-players."

"But if we *can* whip a team that ripped up Princeton for twenty-five points," persisted Bowman, "don't you really think Harvard would give us a game?"

"It won't do you a bit of harm to dream about it. But I should say you were looking about two jumps ahead. Any team that can treat Princeton the way these mountain wild-cats did, is pretty liable to chew you up and spit you out."

"No football team on God's earth can do that,"

declared the McMurray, not as a braggart, but with serene faith in his destiny.

Andy Swope nodded gravely. When Bowman spoke in that strain, it was unseemly to make a jest of it. The coach had often wondered to himself whether this faith invincible might not be a factor as pregnant as all his teaching. And more than once he had reflected: "How will he be when he gets licked? Will he come back, or will it break his heart? No matter how good he is, a man never knows until he faces the wallop."

When the Centre eleven went to West Virginia for this crucial game, the feeling was that they were on the first stage of a journey into the East. Another year might see them farther along the way. This had become their fixed ambition, to measure their prowess against the strongest of the ancient seats of learning and football. It was akin to the spirit of the Kentucky pioneers who had crossed the mountains to explore and subdue regions unfamiliar.

The West Virginia "wild-cats" had no intention of helping to make the Centre College dream come true. In fact, they were firmly determined to knock it into a cocked hat. The game was played, or fought, at Morganstown, on the native heath of these intractable young men who had treated Princeton with such rude vehemence a week earlier. At the end of the first half the score was West Virginia 6, Centre College 0. Scoffing spectators remarked that the Kentuckians should have prayed

harder. Here was one football game in which the Lord helped those who helped themselves to touchdowns.

Perhaps McMurray's clan from the Blue Grass said a few more prayers during the interval. At any rate, they returned to the fray as audaciously confident as ever. After a long period of bruising, indecisive struggle, they took the ball when they were eighty yards from the West Virginia goal and began one of those superb rallies against odds. Not by fluke or accident, but by concerted skill, eleven men as one, did they force their dangerous opponents to retreat. It was one first down after another and the onset was unchecked.

The goal was no longer distant, there were perhaps thirty yards to go, when McMurray called for time to replace a broken shoe-lace. In the thick of a savage scrimmage, his shoe had been almost dragged from his foot. Two or three minutes' delay and he was ready to shout the next signal. Taking the ball himself, he dived and crawled and slid for a gain of half a dozen yards. When he pulled himself clear and trotted into position for the next formation, he was conscious of a stinging pain in his right foot. Every step he took made him suffer, but he tried to disregard it and threw a beautiful forward pass to Fordney.

He limped as he ran to surge into the interference of the next play, which was a dash around the end. The pain was more acute, in the ball of the foot. It was like the searing touch of a red-

hot iron. But he endured it without complaint and was resolved to drive his team across the goal line. They continued the unbroken advance, smashing through or feinting, sweeping back the eleven which had scored such an easy triumph over Princeton. Eighty yards they carried the ball, and it was Centre College 7, West Virginia 6.

Captain Bowman McMurray hobbled back for the next kick-off, but presently he was given a little respite between the periods. He threw himself upon a blanket and in the lull he thought bitterly of the disaster which had overtaken him.

Andy Swope was leaning over him to say:

"Sprained your ankle, Bo? Why didn't you quit? I'll take you out of the game, of course."

"You will not!" cried McMurray; and then he flushed and faltered: "Excuse me, suh. Is that an order? If you say so, it goes, but—but may I explain?"

"Shoot! You can't explain away a bum prop," exclaimed the puzzled coach. "Let me look at that ankle."

"It's not my ankle at all," piteously replied Bowman. "And it won't do a bit of good to look at it. The shoe is laced tight and I'd rather leave it alone if—if you don't mind."

"Talk sense, boy. You are all crippled up. God knows I don't want to pull you out, for this game isn't sewed up by a long shot."

"If you'll let me finish, Andy, I can handle the team all right, and they need me. I don't have

to try any long runs. For Heaven's sake, we've *got* to make one more touch-down against this outfit."

"All right. I'm listening, Bo. But if it isn't a sprain, what does ail you?"

"That tendon is gone," said McMurray. "It can't be anything else. It pulled out where it was spliced. My foot got an awful twist when I broke a shoe-lace. I felt it right after that."

"Then I'll have you lugged to a hospital, right on the jump," exclaimed Andy Swope.

"Please don't do that," begged Bowman. "It can never be mended again. Don't you understand? This is the last game of football I'll ever play for Old Centre. The damage will be no worse if you let me finish it out."

"Holy blazes, Bo, is it as bad as that? You ought to know, I suppose. Of all the infernal luck—"

"She might be a heap sight worse," smiled Bowman. "I came back to college and did what I set out to do—passed along the things I had learned in the war. The *team* goes on just the same. Don't say I can't play this game out, please, suh."

"Go to it, son," answered the coach. "There's no denying you a last little favor like that. But don't tell the rest of the boys. It would knock the heart out of 'em."

"That's mighty nice of you, Andy. I'll never forget it."

"Nor I, Bo. I was wondering just the other

day—well, now I've seen you take as wicked a wallop as could be handed a man. I was wrong, boy."

Garretson lounged up to them and Bowman slowly regained his feet, wincing as he walked along the edge of the field with his comrade.

"How come?" asked "Len." "A casualty? Do they send you back to the dressin'-station?"

"Andy thought it was a sprain," evaded Bowman. "I can play if you don't mind extra work in the last period."

"Don't you lie to me, you old snoozer. I can guess better than that. This here is *some* calamity."

"Forget it, Len. Listen! We showed these mountaineers we could penetrate their defensive. Now if we can do it once more and hold 'em hard, Harvard will read the score with a whole lot of interest to-morrow."

This was precisely what happened in the last period of play. Centre College repeated its notable achievement of an onrush across the enemy's goal line, and then stood firm, smothering the grim endeavors of West Virginia to wrest a victory from defeat. McMurray limped into the thick of it, tackling like a demon or hurling the ball to a waiting comrade, but, alas, the crowd saw not one of those famous runs of his through a broken field. When the last mêlée had been fought and the final signal huskily barked, McMurray went slowly to the dressing-room with his arms across the

supporting shoulders of "Len" Garretson and "Red" Mercer.

Silent, in a corner of the room, Bowman unlaced his shoe and peeled off the heavy stocking. There was blood on the sole of it and he carefully examined the injured foot. He was curious and perplexed. Then he uttered a tremendous war-whoop of jubilation. Andy Swope leaped across the floor and caught hold of the foot which the McMurray was wildly waving in air.

"Look at it, Andy! I am crippled, all right, but it wasn't the tendon at all. I can get over this!"

The coach touched his finger to an ugly hole in the ball of the foot in which some small, jagged object had fairly embedded itself. It was raw and bleeding. The wound was fairly worn into the flesh.

"I'll have a doctor here in a jiffy!" yelled Andy. "It's discolored, like a little piece of hard coal did it. Why didn't you let me take your shoe off during the game, you poor fool?"

"Because I could think of only one thing," answered Bowman, on the brink of weeping. "It hurt like fury. It hurts now."

"Of course it does. No wonder you thought a tendon had busted. This chunk of whatever it is slipped into your shoe when you popped the lace in that scrimmage. Boy, you are one eternal surprise party."

"Life is usually that way," said McMurray.

"You never can tell. It was just exactly as if that tendon had—"

"But it didn't. I'm not scolding, Bo. I never want to see that look on a boy's face again—it sort of haunts me yet. But this is different. Two or three weeks and you'll be frisky again."

"About that game with Harvard next year," earnestly exclaimed Captain Bowman McMurray. "You ought to begin writing right away."

CHAPTER XX

A PILGRIMAGE OF BLUE-GRASS FOLKS

Bowman McMurray's hope was realized after another college year had rolled round and another football season was nearing the end of its tempestuous course. Kentucky in arms was about to engage mighty Harvard. The South would tourney with New England in a test of skill and courage for no other reward than the glory of the game and the honor of the campus. It was the climax of the career of an extraordinary eleven which had never known defeat, which felt no trepidation in undertaking this supreme trial.

It was an adventure somehow colored with romance, or such was its appeal to the Kentucky of the Blue-Grass hills and vales. Border State though it was, the spirit of Dixie-Land was stirred by this bold raid into distant Massachusetts which had not always numbered among its frigid virtues that of minding its own business. There still lingered memories of another era in which this meddlesome attitude had been most annoying. Militant patriarchs like Colonel Harris Shelby had been heard to refer to it in language richly profane. It was easier for them to forgive than to forget.

And would these young knights from Danville be

permitted to ride alone and friendless into this strange country? No, suh, not even if Kentucky had to go on foot. Duty called and chivalry echoed it. Neighbors and loyal partisans would be there to cheer for victory or to console in defeat. A journey of twelve hundred miles was no obstacle at all. They would be ashamed to stay at home. A special train of as many Pullmans as could be hitched together would carry the main body of invaders, while the numerous stragglers could arrange their own transportation to the fighting front.

As for Centre College, it was threatened with an informal suspension of academic activities. For a brief time the historic standards of scholarship were likely to totter. Symptoms of the migration were visible several days before the football team departed. Uneasiness marked the demeanor of such luckless young men as lacked the cash for railroad tickets to Boston. They flocked together for discussion like birds of passage in autumn weather. And you might hear such laments as these:

"It's going to set you back a hundred dollars just to get there and home again. I went to Lexington and hocked my watch and all my clothes except these I've got on, but I'm still shy."

"Be a sport! I should worry. All I ask is the price one way. My legs are good. I can come hoofing it into Danville by Christmas."

"I'm waiting on table in Red Mercer's restaurant.

You know what he did? I take my pay in three meals per day. Red staked me to twenty-five bucks and I'll have to work it out. He called it commutation of rations."

"But you can't eat for a month after you get back, you poor heel. Didn't you think of that?"

"Sure I did. But what's a little thing like that? On to Boston, boy!"

"You said it! What's the matter with beating your way? McMurray told me how. He was a kid hobo one time, in Texas. Let's go."

"Here's your pardner! They'll have to work fast throwin' me off freight trains between here and Mr. Boston's town."

In this manner did several of them flit from the campus, by way of the railroad sidings, the boxcars, and the blind baggage. And sundry conductors and brakemen were not so implacable as usual when they discovered these grimy but cheerful young pilgrims and learned who they were. The president of the college also had a lenient feeling for these truants. For one thing, he intended to go to the game himself. And to inflict severe penalties for such heroic devotion to the cause seemed unjust. There were extenuating circumstances. This adventure was part of a liberal education. To breathe the air of Cambridge and Boston was cultural. Boston said so herself.

The three members of The Lone Star Corporation held a conference during one of the few leisure hours of this final week. Older by several years

than when they had begun the good fight together in the Somersworth high school, the college had stamped them with its hall-mark. As leaders of campus opinion they had acquired dignity without self-importance. But to each other they were the same old Texas kids, McMurray the warrior with the hair-trigger temper and the readier fists, old man Garretson's youngest son who always played a poor hand well, and the brick-topped John Calvin with the brains of the outfit who never had to worry about the future because it was predestinated a million years ago.

"There is a tremendous lot of interest in this game up North," said Bowman. "I shouldn't be surprised if several thousand people came to see us play."

Garretson looked up from writing a letter and asked, with a certain anxiety:

"You feel dead sure of winning, don't you, Bo? No sinkin' sensation in the pit of your stomach?"

"Put it another way, Len. I don't see how we can lose. Harvard's got the weight and the power and a wonderful organization—why, the coaching staff is 'most as big as our faculty, and the 'varsity squad had as many men as our whole college, earlier in the season. But we have met all kinds of teams, and not one of 'em could stop us. Last year West Virginia was rated right up with Harvard, and the best they could do was one touch-down."

"Yale is a right smart football college," pursued the canny Garretson, "and what Harvard has been

doing to her for years is simply cruel. Not that I aim to croak, Bo, and I don't know as you ever saw me holler before I was hurt, but my motto generally is to hope for the best when you go up against a thing like this."

"I'm astonished, Len," shouted the aggrieved McMurray. "Where's your faith? You talk like a confounded back-slid Presbyterian. What is it that has carried us along from one touch-down to another? Faith that could remove mountains, you poor fish!"

"We tunneled some of 'em," grinned Garretson, "with snappy interference. Don't get me wrong, Bo. I won't play any worse for viewin' these Harvard red-legs with sincere respect. They have fifty years of football behind 'em. They are hoary with it."

John Calvin Mercer, Junior, had been listening with a serious expression. He picked up the argument to say:

"Len is perfectly right. All he has in mind is to ease it a little for you, Bo, in case the game breaks wrong."

"But it won't! It can't!" was the fervid protest. "You boys never did gloom this way before. What's happened to your religion? The Lord is your shield and buckler, and you can gain ground through the Philistines if you don't get rattled."

"Don't cuss us, Bo," begged Garretson. "We're with you. You know that. I started this fuss. Any man with good intentions is sure to be mis-

understood. That's what makes most of us nature's noblemen wear sad, serious faces under our hat-brims. Let's talk cheerful. Who is liable to come on from Texas to witness this sectional quarrel at Boston?"

"Fayette Caldwell is already here, coaching," said Bowman. "Sallie starts tomorrow. My dad expects to be with them. Mother couldn't be persuaded. She's afraid I may be killed or something and it might worry her. Women are sensitive that way, 'specially football mothers."

"My mother is that way," said Red Mercer. "But father has been invited to join the party, and he writes that Tom McMurray insists on paying the freight. Great, isn't it? The experience will shake the Reverend John Calvin Mercer out of the ministerial rut."

"Bully for my dad!" exclaimed Bowman. "He is a worthy parent, let me tell you. Has anybody heard—well, I had an intuition that Nancy Overton might be shipmates with Sallie Caldwell, but Fayette is mighty indefinite."

"Why shouldn't he be? Fayette is a football coach, and he looks at it just as Andy Swope does," came from the sagacious Garretson. "They don't pine to have you playing football with one eye on a girl in the grand-stand."

"Nan Overton is sensible," said Mercer. "Very few pretty girls are. Do you suppose she'd get poor old McMurray all excited by coming on to this Harvard game? Not on your life. She knows him.

I learned something about her superior intellect that summer I was delivering groceries. We seemed like kindred spirits, and when I've seen her wasting her time on McMurray, since then, I felt sorry—"

"Hit him in the eye, Len. You're closest," commanded the insulted McMurray. "It's one of those second lieutenant relapses."

Danville trooped to the station *en masse* when the special train was ready to depart. The band played and the streets were bright with the colors of Old Centre, gold and white. Urchins to whom "Bo" McMurray and his men were demigods sneaked into the sleeping-cars amid the farewell confusion and stowed themselves under the seats. The porters were plucking them out all the way to Lexington. Desperate freshman smuggled themselves aboard and hoped the conductor might overlook them.

In a stateroom compartment sat a gaunt old gentleman with an air still martial. He was, in truth, a Kentucky colonel of a rare old vintage. He had declared to his wife that he proposed to see it through with the boys if they had to fetch him back to Somersworth in a wooden box. His companion was a grizzled chief quartermaster, retired, of the United States Navy. On his blue coat was the ribbon of the Navy Cross and one sleeve hung empty. These two veterans were not included in the coaching staff, nor had they an expert knowledge of football, but the team was indebted to them, nevertheless, for benefactions invaluable. Their souls were marching on.

Centre College carried no army of trainers, lackeys, rubbers. Its players were not treated like young princes too precious to lift their own suitcases. In the baggage-car you might have seen that versatile coach, Andy Swope, seated upon a trunk while he plied needle and thread and mended torn jerseys and damaged breeches. Assisting him were "Red" Mercer and "Bo" McMurray who had learned the rudiments of the tailor's craft while pressing the wrinkles out of Somersworth.

The special train reached Boston on the day before the game. Andy Swope hustled his squad out to the Harvard Stadium for practice, and they began to realize that little Centre College had, indeed, been put on the map. The immense, towering amphitheatre almost dismayed the Kentuckians. Their courteous hosts informed them that every seat had been sold in advance, that forty thousand people would crowd these vast stone tiers, with ten thousand more clamoring for the chance of admittance. Only the classic contest with Yale had ever drawn such a multitude. To the visitors this was incomprehensible.

"I know crowds," said Andy Swope. "This outfit of ours has caught the popular taste for something different. We're a queer college that is said to be full of religion and pep. Freakish, that's how these folks size us up. All they ever heard come out of the Blue Grass before was whiskey and race-horses."

"It will be the greatest moment in my life, Andy—" began the McMurray.

"No gestures, boy, and oratory is barred. I'm a busy man and I can stand just about so much."

From the Stadium they went to a hotel and thence to Cambridge as guests of the Harvard team for the early hours of the evening. They were fine fellows well met, these antagonists of the East and the South, and the "praying Kentucky Colonels" were discovered to be very much like other undergraduates. They did not chew tobacco nor stuff their trousers in their boots nor wear flasks on their hips. Most of them would have been indistinguishable on the Harvard campus.

In the corridors of the Boston hotel where many of the visitors had engaged rooms, the curious onlookers sought in vain to find picturesque types. The only exceptions, and these were delightful, happened to be Colonel Harris Shelby and his friend the circuit judge from Somersworth who ambled arm-in-arm and displayed that impressive courtesy of deportment which, alas, survives mostly in fiction. Boston welcomed them with the utmost cordiality, but they held a little aloof. It was difficult to feel that this was not alien soil.

Andy Swope sent his men to bed before they could wander in search of their own friends and kinfolk. The family reunions could be held after the game. Anxious parents or sweethearts were disturbing elements. They worried more about a boy breaking a leg than winning a game. And this battle with Harvard would make them more unreasonable than usual. Nobody had ever made

these Centre College players nervous, and this was a poor time to begin.

They were nervous next day, however, and Andy Swope had to admit it to himself. There was too much of McMurray's feeling that this was a climax instead of an episode. It was perceptible while they were changing into their football clothes at the Stadium. Into the amphitheatre poured the multitude, filling the aisles like a swirling tide, flowing over the terraced rows of seats, crowding at the gates. The consciousness of this great cloud of witnesses was disquieting. And so few of them, a mere handful, felt any ties of attachment to Centre College! To the young men who awaited the ordeal, it was like a Roman mob in the Coliseum.

As was the custom, honest words of prayer were said, that more than ever they should quit themselves like men because of the greater responsibility. Then Fayette Caldwell, a gentleman unafraid, spoke in his quiet, affectionate manner, and he comforted and steadied them more than any one else could have done:

"You will forget these forty thousand people the minute the ball is kicked off. Why not forget them now? And Harvard is merely another game in the schedule. Don't take it so hard. Some coaches would be telling you to fight. I want you to ease the tension. The Harvard team is afraid of *you*, remember, and every man of them is as fidgety as you boys are. They know your record, and you really have the moral edge on them. Four years

undefeated is in their minds this minute, and they don't feel happy about it. *Now go in and eat 'em up!*"

They trotted into the arena and dispersed for swift rehearsal. A glance at the crowded slopes of the Stadium all flecked with crimson flags and the nervous strain tautened again. It was more like stage fright than this veteran eleven had ever felt. But now there came roaring down to them a tremendous outburst of applause. It was not the courageous cheer of a few hundred partisans from Kentucky, but the voice of many thousands. Bowman McMurray flashed a smile at "Len" Garretson and slapped him on the back as he shouted above the tumult:

"Would you believe it? Where did all these friends of ours come from? And they call it cold roast Boston!"

"Looks like we put it across, boy. This listens to me like an ovation for our little old Blue-Grass college."

They turned to gaze at the Harvard team and a horde of substitutes who scampered along the edge of the field with blankets streaming behind them. As the chosen eleven in the crimson jerseys detached themselves and ran across the turf, they appeared more formidable than any players that Centre had ever encountered. Prestige accounted somewhat for this impression, but there also was an advantage in weight averaging ten pounds a man. It meant just that much more brawn, momentum, concerted power. But Captain McMurray cheerily passed the old slogan along:

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall."

CHAPTER XXI

"WIN OR LOSE, YOU LOOK GOOD TO US!"

THE game had no more than begun when the Kentucky eleven discovered that it had never battered itself against a rush-line like this Harvard phalanx. It was massive and yet mobile. Against it the initial assaults were futile, and, instead of a first down, McMurray was compelled to punt the ball. Harvard assumed the offensive, with more than half the length of the field to go. There were no spectacular forward passes, no adroitly masked attempts to outflank the eager Centre line, while on the other hand it was not the bludgeon of mere brute strength. These men in the crimson jerseys clove through resistance like the blow of a battle-axe. They struck as one, and the Kentuckians reeled back a dozen yards.

Swiftly Harvard struck again and again, always with the same result. Driven back, but unshaken in spirit, McMurray's comrades endeavored to solve the problem of an attack which revealed a power of organization beyond their experience. They could not prevent Harvard from scoring. This was inevitable. But would they be played off their feet before they could counter with their own rapid and crafty tactics?

"Red" Mercer, in the thick of it, gazetted as the

"All-American" centre-rush of the preceding season, and Bowman McMurray, a quarter-back who had won a like distinction, were using their nimble wits even while Harvard trampled them in retreat. The strongest team has its flaws, men who are slower than others or who betray their intentions by a posture, by a glance of the eye.

Seven times did Harvard strike unchecked, unfaltering, and the ball traversed more than half the length of the field in this series of impressive advances. It halted only when the Kentucky goal had been invaded, when a touch-down had been so easily won that the forty thousand people who gazed down at them felt something like chagrin. Was this the thrilling show which had been promised? These over-advertised Southerners should have stayed in the Blue Grass where they belonged. The result was foreshadowed in these first few minutes of play.

The belief of the young Kentuckians was quite otherwise. They were wiser, steadier, for this baptism of fire. It had banished all semblance of nervous uncertainty. Harvard was formidable, but no longer an unknown equation. No sooner had "Red" Mercer laid hands on the ball, with the team alertly on its toes and McMurray yelping the signal, than the Harvard touch-down was forgotten. They were about to swing into their stride. Every man felt it with a sense of tingling confidence.

And presently the vast crowd was shouting madly Never was applause more generous and unpartisan.

It died and swelled again in greater volume with each fresh inspiration of

"*First down, Kentucky!*"

It was the kind of football which had been expected of these gallant visitors, showy, versatile, resourceful. They were living up to all that had been said of them. The Harvard team, schooled to meet every style of play, seemed bewildered. Instead of their own precisely ordered formations, the Kentuckians appeared to improvise. They shifted their objective in full flight if an opening suddenly disclosed itself elsewhere, and the interference swooped to turn with the runner as though it were intuitive and not prearranged. The ball passed from hand to hand, behind the line, or was flung far forward of it, in the most hazardous fashion, but always there was a man ready to snatch it out of the air and dart on a course of his own.

The Harvard ends were presumed to be invulnerable, but the Centre College backs shot past them and wheeled to gain more ground. It was elusive football, and peculiarly intelligent. In a manner all their own, the Kentuckians were overcoming the handicap of superior strength and a coaching system far more elaborate. Without a slip or fumble they advanced in a sequence of these brilliant dashes until the ball had been carried two thirds of the distance between the goal posts. The rapier was a match for the battle-axe. Another sensational sprint and Centre College had a touchdown of its own. The score was tied.

No more than five minutes after this, forty thousand men and women were again lifted to their feet by a common impulse. They waved hats, flags, umbrellas. Perfect strangers pommeled each other. The noise they made was appalling. McMurray had hurled a forward pass far over the heads of the Harvard men. Its trajectory was a joy to behold. More than a hundred feet it sped, this leather oval so unhandily shaped, and dropped into the arms of Gentry, the half-back. How he arrived there in time was a miracle.

With winged heels he spurned the turf and skimmed for the Harvard goal, thirty-five yards away. Two pairs of stout crimson legs pounded in his wake, but Gentry had urgent business and could not be detained. He later swore he was going so fast that his knees flew up and hit his chin. Garretson was of the opinion that a bullet from the old Colt's forty-five would just about have made a dead heat of it. This jewel of a touch-down gave the lead to the Kentuckians by 14 to 7.

In twelve years neither Yale nor Princeton had been able to score two touch-downs in a championship contest with Harvard. The little Blue-Grass college was making football history and bowling over precedents. It had brought something more with it than a reputation. The New England temperament may be calm and repressed, but one could never have guessed it in this frenzied Stadium. The prevailing sentiment was not of mourning for Harvard, but of rejoicing with the plucky lads from

Kentucky. The spirit of sportsmanship was not confined to the football field.

A substitute ran out to take the place of a Harvard tackle who showed signs of weariness. The newcomer halted to shake hands with McMurray and they grinned at each other as long-lost buddies.

"Hello, Bo, you useless gob! Queenstown was never like this. You'll get torpedoed this cruise."

"Not a chance, Bill. You're scuppered. Too much speed. We're the real thing in destroyers."

It was a small incident which displayed the spirit between antagonists who fought desperately, but without malice. And when Harvard again took possession of the ball and was repeating her first crashing series of advances, the multitude cheered to encourage the Kentucky Colonels to hold fast. So great was the noise that the Harvard men could not hear the signals shouted by their quarter-back and there was delay and confusion. Captain McMurray threw up his arm with a gesture which was quickly comprehended. It told the crowd to be quiet. Fair play demanded it. Obediently the tumult hushed, but you may be sure that they liked the visitors no less because of this rebuke.

There is a sound adage, that an eleven is no stronger than its rush-line. This is merely to paraphrase the doctrine that the infantry is the backbone of an army. Harvard had a vital advantage in this respect. It was exhibited when the Crimson again seized the initiative, and, using precisely the same tactics as before, drove Centre College back

over the same distance, more than sixty yards, and scored a second touch-down splendidly earned. It tied the score at 14–14, and carried the game to the end of the first half.

The Stadium had staged many a great contest, but never one so heart-stirring as this. The crowd sank back to catch its breath and a brief interval of sanity. Instead of seeking seclusion, to be rubbed and fussed over, the unconventional Kentuckians sat in a group on their blankets, at the side of the field, like Indians in bivouac and chatted with the president of Centre College. To Harvard spectators the incident seemed a trifle odd, almost bizarre. It was a family affair.

From a tier of the amphitheatre, Colonel Harris Shelby of Somersworth gazed down and was lost in thought. His shoulders had sagged forward, and his hands were clasped upon the crook of his cane, as though for support. One missed the soldierly poise of the snowy head. It was not all fatigue. He was aroused by the hearty voice of Michael Brennan.

"I'm all wore out meself, Colonel. 'Tis worse thin chasin' German submarines. Shut your eyes an' snooze a bit. I'll pipe ye to quarters when th' action recomminces. They have hauled off to repair damages an' take the wounded below."

"The boys have shot their bolt, God bless 'em," replied the Colonel, and at last his accents were aged and broken. "They don't think so. If this game could only quit right now—"

"Are ye forgettin' Paul Jones, me dear man? '*They have not begun to fight.*' Look how they run rings around these big Harvard battle-wagons. 'Twas like Beatty's cruisers at Jutland."

"And when Beatty stood up to heavier metal—what then, Mike? He was pounded to pieces. I'm not a naval man, but an old soldier who followed a Lost Cause."

"Now what has that to do with a football team that has stood th' aristocracy of Harvard on its head for a brace of touch-downs an' will romp home with siveral more unless they drop dead?"

"Men and resources whipped the Confederacy," answered Colonel Shelby. "We had the courage, the leadership, the devotion."

"And that fits th' case in hand?" incredulously exclaimed the chief quartermaster.

"I'm afraid so, Mike. I refused to admit it till Harvard banged out that last hellish touch-down, like Grant ploughin' his way through the Wilderness. They can throw in fresh men in the next half, a new eleven if they like, and we're mighty shy."

"We won't need 'em at all, Colonel. These lads of ours will hop into it as gay as they started. There's been other games as tough to chew on as this wan. 'Tis not even a stern chase. They are fair abeam of one another, with an even score."

Colonel Shelby shook his head and said no more. He had waved his hat and yelled with the rest of them, carried away on the tide of enthusiasm, with

a personal pride and an intense loyalty which those around him could not feel. But emotion was unable to obscure his vision or dull his wisdom.

With a whimsical smile he bethought himself of the telegram which the Governor of Kentucky had sent to Captain Bowman McMurray, just before this game:

> The men in Kentucky are pulling for you, the women are praying for you. For God's sake, make good and hit the line hard and low.

To these shrewd practical No'therners this was sentimental drivel. Harvard football had the wealth, the material, the efficiency of a large business corporation. Football at Danville had been largely builded upon sentiment. And in his own brave youth Colonel Shelby had seen sentiment go down to glorious defeat.

Bowman McMurray would have considered such misgivings treasonable. He was sublimely confident that his team could score again and stand braced in the last ditch against the Harvard offensive. Already they had done what Yale and Princeton had failed to do in many years.

Quite early in the fateful second half, however, Harvard struck again, irresistibly. The attack shifted from one flank to the other. It fairly hurled the lighter Kentuckians out of its path. They had never encountered a human machine so smoothly assembled as this. It had been put together for the special purpose of demolishing a Yale rush-line of tremendous resisting power. Spare parts were

ready, as one might say, for replacement at the slightest sign of wear. Tired men were taken out and substitutes rushed in whenever the pace seemed to slacken. In all, twenty-two Harvard players were used before the end of the game.

Centre had no more than half a dozen substitutes of reliable merit. In this respect it was gravely outclassed. Its eggs were in one basket and it could afford to have few of them broken. When Harvard hammered the Kentuckians back and so scored a third touch-down, thereby taking the lead, it was the beginning of the end. Centre was as courageous as before, but the fine edge of its speed was dulled by weariness. It displayed flashes of brilliancy, now a long run by McMurray, again a series of forward passes which carried it to the very shadow of the Harvard goal, but in the crucial moments the stalwart heroes of the crimson were as impenetrable as a stone wall. And they had learned how to range wide and forestall those dazzling passes and shifty end runs. Their coaches had not been idle during the intermission.

Until the very last, while the western sun slanted across the Stadium, the Kentuckians strove valiantly to turn the tide which rolled against them. They died hard, unconvinced that defeat had overtaken them, hoping to break clear of that relentless Harvard defense and retrieve the day as they had done on many another field. But it had ceased to be a matter of one touch-down to overcome. Their astonishing forward passes had slowed down a trifle.

Harvard snatched one of them in its flight and scored again. And a goal kicked from the field increased the tally of the game to Harvard 31, Centre 14. The better eleven won. It had been highly trained to meet opponents as thoroughly schooled. It was probably the strongest football team in the United States.

The dashing invaders had expected too much, they had dared too greatly, but they would never forget the tribute of cheers which had rolled down to them like the boom of surf against the cliffs. It was a precious verdict. They were not victors, but they were sportsmen and gentlemen. First to grasp the hand of the Harvard captain was Bowman McMurray who said a word of congratulation in a voice hoarse with fatigue. Then he trudged with his silent comrades into the dressing-room. They desired to be left alone with their sorrow.

Andy Swope soon joined them and stood looking at these broken-hearted young athletes, nor did he find their tears unmanly. He could remember suffering in the same way. All he said was:

"That's right, boys. Cry and get over it. You will get no consolation stuff from me. I don't want to be booted out of here. You did good work, better than I expected. And I think more of you than I did yesterday."

"D-don't jolly us, p-please," blubbered Fordney. "We are disgraced for l-life."

"Sure you are," amiably agreed the coach. "They are getting set to welcome you with an old

Kentucky lynching-bee in Danville, right in the middle of the campus."

"I don't doubt it a bit," quavered McMurray. "If I hadn't stumbled that time I was almost clear—and if I had sent Garretson at tackle instead of for the end when we had only six yards to go—"

"And if the dog hadn't stopped to scratch fleas, there would have been a dead rabbit, Bo. Hustle into your clothes and let's go eat Boston out of house and home. Somebody has to lose every football game. That's what makes 'em interesting."

"We went out of our class and got properly trimmed," said the Garretson kid. "Maybe we can give old Harvard a whirl next year. Wow, if this was football, give me another war!"

"Red" Mercer was nursing a large bruise on the shin. He turned to say to the doleful McMurray:

"Our folks from Texas will be expecting us for dinner at the hotel. They arrived late last night, I suppose you know. Why didn't you look them up this morning? I did."

"Because I didn't feel like it. And now I don't want to see anybody."

"Figured on a grand entrance after the game, plaudits and things, didn't you?" unkindly suggested the minister's son.

"Shut up," snapped McMurray, "or I'll dislocate a few freckles."

"Here, you boys quit that," drawled Garretson. "You've been run ragged an' your tempers are frazzled. I know what ails the second lieutenant.

Nancy Overton *did* come trailin' along with the Texas outfit."

"I know she's in Boston," sighed Bowman, "but I shan't see her. After this awful calamity—why, it's utterly out of the question. Give her my fondest regards, Red, old man. She'll understand. The pitcher went once too often to the well, just as Fayette Caldwell told me when I was a boy."

"You talk like it's empty above the ears," said Garretson. "Hustle, boy, and let's kiss this Stadium good-bye. I never did like to linger close to one of your awful calamities."

They rode into Boston together, a dejected company, dreading to encounter their friends. They were perfectly sincere about it. Not as heroes, but as outcasts would they return to Kentucky. That the Centre College eleven should be whipped was not a misfortune, but a crime. McMurray was for stealing into the hotel by a side entrance, but the Garretson kid threatened to punch his head.

When they trooped into the hotel lobby, it seemed as though the delegation of Kentucky pilgrims had mobilized to wait their coming. Centre College students, Danville people, landed gentry of the rich Blue-Grass farms, high-salaried tobacco buyers and auctioneers in expensive raiment, sunburned breeders and trainers from Lexington who had bet even money on "the praying Colonels" and took their losses without turning a hair, dignified lawyers who were proud to be Centre College alumni, unclassified adherents who had somehow

trailed along to Boston without return tickets—they were all waiting to greet the football team. One startled glimpse and the melancholy McMurray interpreted it as a mob scene. They had gathered to give this eleven what it deserved. The lynching-bee was to be rehearsed this side of Danville. The young man was not in a composed state of mind, for life was a complete ruin.

He halted to glower at this assemblage, as truculent as when he had begun his football career by licking more policemen than usual in those far-off Fort Hawley days. Somebody emitted a shrill, "yip! yip!" the war cry of Dixie-Land, and the sedate hotel reëchoed to a cheer of unanimous approval, of hearty homage and fealty. And then the vanquished champions ran the gantlet of friends who pressed forward to shake hands with them. Bewildered, they wanted to sit down and cry again. They heard Frank Prentiss, the Danville banker, shouting at them:

"This is a mere ripple, boys. Watch the old town when Johnny comes marching home. Listen to this wire. They just now shot it through from Danville."

Plans for parade already under way. Bands and fireworks. Say when. Governor 'phones from Frankfort he'll be here with bells on. Win or lose, you look good to Kentucky.

CHAPTER XXII

LIFE IS NOT A COMPLETE RUIN

Mr. Thomas McMurray, the father of Bowman, had planned the little dinner party as a celebration before turning southward from Boston. He had been led confidently to expect football results quite different. Reviewing the afternoon's events in the Stadium, he wondered whether to call the dinner a wake or a requiem. For one guest the cloud had a silver lining. The Reverend John Calvin Mercer, of the Northern Presbyterian Church, had been not only shaken but jolted out of the ministerial rut at beholding his scholarly son suffer as many violent perils as the Apostle Paul. This was a time for devout gratitude that he still possessed the normal number of arms and legs.

Colonel Shelby, of Kentucky, and Chief Quartermaster Michael Brennan, of the United States Navy and the world at large, were invited as intimate friends of Bowman. Otherwise it was a Texas party. Fayette Caldwell and his Sallie were, of course, included. Miss Nancy Overton had made the long journey from Fort Hawley, yielding to persuasion at the last moment. Bowman had written one of his eloquent letters, urging her to share the crowning triumph of Old Centre.

It was to be inferred that this would be the long-awaited opportunity for him to prove that he was, beyond a shadow of doubt, a worthy young fellow. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, he reminded her, "and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." For once Bowman quoted Scripture with accuracy. He had taken pains to look it up. There was something "highly significant" in the fact that he had known Nan Overton just about seven years. It was one of those extraordinary "coinc'dences" which had strewn his pathway.

To Mr. Thomas McMurray's dinner came the three young Texans of the football team, rather as mourners than as guests ready to enliven a sociable reunion. They brightened at the sight of Nancy. If a vision so charming could not help them to forget their tribulation, the outlook was hopeless. Bowman paid her one of his compliments by exclaiming as they met:

"Lead, kindly light, amid th' encircling gloom! You happened to be among those present on a sad day in history, Nan. How do you feel?"

"Glad I came, Bo, but sorry for you boys," she told him with that dear smile which could be so pitiful and tender. "You lost a game, but gained new friends. And the old ones are still true. Friends are worth ever so much more than football. I came from Texas to tell you so."

"May I sit next to you at dinner, Nan? Long-distance friendship like yours, that disregards

mileage and things, is mighty comforting in such times as these."

"Red Mercer seems to feel the same way," laughed Nancy. "I reckon I'd better sit between you, if it's agreeable to our host. First aid to the injured? My special mission is Red Cross work."

It was fine to see old Colonel Shelby rally, for a little while, from his great weariness. He would retire early, said he, with Mr. Thomas McMurray's permission, but it was his pleasure to pay a tribute to the beauty and chivalry of the South. To his right bower, Michael Brennan, he confided with a trace of petulance that prohibition had cast a cursed blight over the fairest land on God's green footstool and enslaved a free people . . . at a seasonable hour they would toddle to their suite of rooms and solace themselves with a night-cap of good Kentucky liquor, and call it a day.

"An Admiral of the Fleet could show no wiser judgment," murmured Mike. "I'm a solid man meself an' well preserved, but wan more day like this would bilge me."

As a dinner party it lacked sparkle and spontaneity. Colonel Shelby devoted himself to Sallie Caldwell and paid court to her as he did to every pretty young woman. It was both a duty and a habit. At the head of the table Mr. Thomas McMurray was jovial and attentive, the pattern of a host, but even he lapsed now and then in moods grave and absent-minded. It troubled him to see his son unhappy. He knew how youth

could suffer. Outwardly the least disturbed was old man Garretson's youngest son. Before the reformation, in his sinfully precocious youth at the stud-poker table, he had displayed this same suave indifference to fate.

Old Mike Brennan found him a congenial spirit. Far apart in years, they were alike in a philosophy of life which stood up and took it as it came. They yarned of ships and men, of the decks and the trenches, and it all came back to the basic doctrine that the only man worth while was the guy that stood the gaff. The Reverend John Calvin Mercer listened and had glimpses of sermons which he hoped might carry a new appeal to the congregation of the Northern Presbyterian Church.

What changed the course of the dinner was an impromptu speech by Colonel Shelby. It occurred to him to read them a brief newspaper clipping which he fished out of his wallet as he stiffly rose to his feet. This was both a courtesy to the ladies and the instinct of the lifelong orator.

"As a citizen of Kentucky and an alumnus of Centre College," said he, in his stateliest manner, "it behooves me to express my warm appreciation of the cordial feelin' of Harvard University and the populace toward our defeated but no less admirable football team. It has agreeably surprised yo' humble servant to find New England so much like other folks. One discordant note obtrudes itself, a triflin' matter, but enough to show that the

meddlesome spirit of the Abolitionists has not wholly perished in an age so much more tolerant and enlightened. A Boston newspaper of this mornin', while most kindly disposed toward our gallant athletes, went out of its way to tell us how to run our little college down in Kentucky. I quote as follows, ladies and gentlemen":

> . . . Certainly it seems to be that academic studies are not having an over-emphasis in an institution which can put its president, faculty, and student body in a special train for a football jaunt from Kentucky to Boston. The college authorities of New England are occasionally perturbed over the extent to which athletics encroach upon the classroom. Centre College seems to have a workable solution of the problem, which is to suspend academic operations altogether when the gridiron warriors hit the trail.

Colonel Shelby laid down the offensive clipping with an air of disdain and resumed his seat. Comment was superfluous. Bowman McMurray had been startled out of his painful introspections. He was bending forward, as though poised to run with the ball. Nancy Overton flashed a smile at "Len" Garretson, who solemnly winked the signal of acknowledgment. The message read that the surest way to restore the McMurray to normal form was to give him the cue for a speech. He shoved back his chair and stood at attention, solid, deep-chested, serious, but with a play of sensitive emotions in those eyes of Irish gray. Earnestly he declaimed:

"You know what President Wilson said. '*There*

is a small college in Kentucky that in its years of existence has turned out more men that have attained prominence than has Princeton in more than twice that length of time!' Remember when I told you that, Len, old man, when we rode home from the Rio Grande, and it nearly knocked you off your pony? It was the turning-point in your career, wasn't it? Why be disturbed by the dyspeptic ignorance of an editor who is a twin brother to the other codfish that hangs in the Boston State House?"

The McMurray was himself again, or rather he was forgetting himself. Garretson warned Mike Brennan to watch out for eulogies. If ever a boy could kid himself out of his troubles, said "Len," it was this same black-haired wonder from Texas. All he needed was a running start and plenty of room to swing his rope. True to this anticipation, Bowman's face shone and his gestures were impressive as he went on to tell them:

"Old Centre is still turning 'em out, as the centuries roll by. Yonder sits John Calvin Mercer, Junior, for instance. Has *he* ever 'suspended academic operations' to hit the gridiron trail? Not even in his sleep. The pet and pride of the father who bred him, the ornament of an illustrious campus, he will live to make mathematics more difficult, and future generations of boneheaded students will curse the day he was born. Passing lightly by this red-headed phenomenon, let us look at young Leonard Garretson who began life

as a bench-legged cow-puncher with nothing to recommend him but ability to land a knock-out with each hand. He is now destined for a brilliant career, whatever it is.

"Harvard can show us how to play football, in some respects, but our faith in Andy Swope and Fayette Caldwell—now there's a *man* that little Old Centre turned out. He blushes at the mere mention of his name and is liable to slide under the table, so I mercifully desist. Do you know, what happened this afternoon may be a blessing in disguise and a warning to build up a stronger rush-line against the arrow that flieth by day an' the terror that walketh in darkness. In other words, we'll show 'em that Centre can come back. Nobody can express the spirit that never knows when it's whipped better than Chief Quartermaster Mike Brennan, of the old Queenstown Flotilla. He has the deck."

Cheerful and glowing, the McMurray sat down and old Mike bowed, a noble personification of disciplined duty and self-effacement. His stern, weather-beaten features softened wonderfully as he said:

"I have a strong interest in this boy an' his team an' his college. After what I saw to-day, I'm well satisfied that they are passin' it along. As an old shipmate of Bowman's I will say no more. 'Tis me great reward for a favor or two I may have done th' lad whilst I was in th' service."

Soon after this, Colonel Shelby said his adieus

and he leaned heavily on Mike Brennan's arm as they passed out of the room. The others lingered a little longer and then found it pleasanter to finish the evening in a private sitting-room. Thomas McMurray said to his son as they walked along the hall together:

"I telegraphed the mother, Bowman. She was anxious to know. She wept a bit, no doubt, but there was comfort in what I told her."

"How did you break it to her, dad? I couldn't figure out what to send."

"'*It was terrible hard on his clothes, but he kept his temper,*'" replied Thomas McMurray, with his hearty chuckle. "You've been a good boy, Bowman."

"Everybody has always been *so* darn good to me," said the young McMurray, and it expressed even more than he was aware.

The guests were not inclined to tarry late. By one and two they drifted out and the host strolled downstairs with the Presbyterian clergyman. They left behind them Bowman McMurray and one other. He suddenly looked around the room and exclaimed:

"Why, Nan, there's nobody here but us. How did *that* happen?"

"And you ought to follow them, Bo. You are so tired and sleepy that I dread watching you smother one more yawn. It looks so painful."

"Nancy Overton, that's an insult. I could no more yawn in your presence—"

"What do I care, you poor, tired boy! I'm surprised that you can sit up and take notice at all. Is there anything more on your mind that has to be said to-night?"

"Well, I don't want to seem impatient or anything, Nan, but after waiting seven years—"

"You can wait a little longer? You are always logical, Bo," said Nancy, with a gleam of mischief in her eyes. "Remember the message I sent by Colonel Shelby when he went to find you and take you out of the Navy? '*Some day!*' "

"And here I am 'most through college," he protested, "but our relations are still unsatisfactory, Nan, dear. I have seen you at home now and then, when I wasn't working away somewhere in vacations, and we seem to have got out of the habit of misunderstanding each other, which used to be so tragic and forlorn. You have no idea how I wandered out into the night from your house, when I was a boy, and decided never to marry."

"Don't, Bowman. I never did know whether to laugh or cry over you. Be sensible and tell me what your plans are, after football and college."

"Dad wants me to start in with him. Thomas McMurray & Son, hardware manufacturers. It means overalls and small wages for a while. Dad is that kind of a boss. You wouldn't believe it, Nan, but I've been actually offered thousands of dollars a year to play professional football. Nothing to it! That wasn't what I went to college for, though I used to think so."

"You could marry some nice girl ever so much sooner," suggested Nancy.

"*You* don't want me to be a professional athlete!" exclaimed Bowman. "What would become of all my ideals and things?"

"Of course not," said she, just as earnestly. "Then you *could* accuse me of '*dislikin' football.*' "

"So much for that, Nan! Not but what money and matrimony have to go hand in hand, to a certain extent. It's perfectly wonderful to be talking to you this way, even if we are both tired and sleepy. This has been a hard day for all concerned. But I always have a curious feeling that I may never see you again. You have been more or less of a beautiful phantom, or words to that effect, ever since you faded out of Cincinnati, the time you were visiting your aunt, Miss Ellen Hotchkiss, on Meridian Street. I forgave you long ago, just as I'd forgive you 'most anything for the sake of harmony, but it left me uneasy."

"That mysterious telegram?" smiled Nancy, quite unconcerned. "You had better ask Len Garretson. He won't tell you much, but he hinted to me that he was mixed up in it. He said you needed a change of air, or something of the sort. That is all I know, honestly. Len is not loquacious."

"The old Texas fox!" cried Bowman, not in the least resentful. "No use mentioning it to him now. I surely did need a change of air just then! And so you never sent it at all, Nan! My mind

is certainly relieved about you. Women may be complex, but they ought not to add unnecessary kinks."

"Women love courage and devotion and unselfishness," replied Nancy, with frank tenderness.

"I know you do, and it's a fine mental attitude," sighed Bowman McMurray, "but if you could only love *me* in spite of my numerous failings—"

"*Some day*—" began Nancy.

The door opened and "Len" Garretson entered with his lazy tread. He coughed and would have withdrawn, but his sense of humor detained him. With a grin on that lean, steadfast countenance he drawled:

"Beg pardon, folks, but there's a boy named Red Mercer waiting outside with a little chess-box under one arm and a load of groceries under the other. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him to go jump off the roof," savagely retorted McMurray.

"Sit down, Len," sweetly invited Nancy. "Bowman was in the midst of a romance, but he can finish it—*some day*."

"Motion-picture stuff!" said the cynical Garretson kid. "I wasn't joking just now. Red will ramble along directly to say good-night."

He held up three fingers, close together, and gazed at Bowman with a wicked twinkle in those sombre eyes as he murmured:

"*Just like this!*"

THE END

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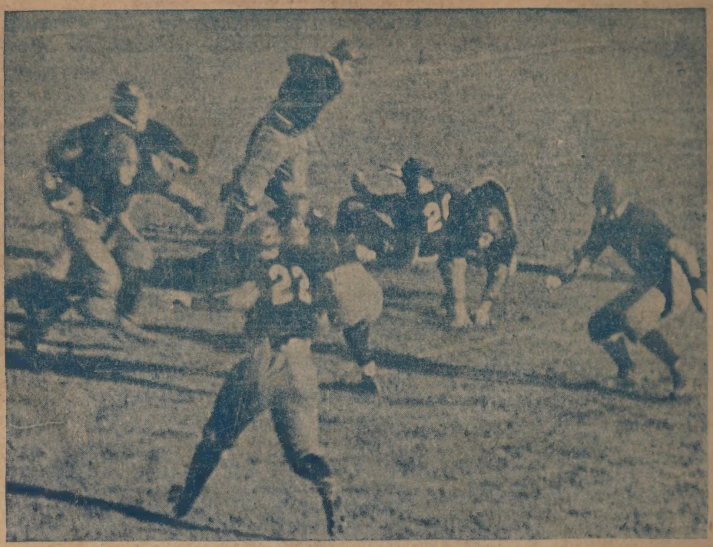

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